

Meliptimous Taggle

and Other Tales of Ill Repute

VAGO DAMITIO

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PAPERBACK ISBN:978-1-939827-18-0

EBOOK ISBN:978-1-939827-19-7

vagobondtravelmedia.com

DEDICATION

I dedicate these stories to Lynn Aase, my high school English teacher. Thank you for the pizza.

(Aase in the kitchen, big horn rimmed glasses and blue checked Pjs. Reaches up to the cupboard for some coffee but pulls the whole cupboard down just to pack the mocha at the table. He steps outside and looks off the deck into the fjords of Norway, stretches and gets on a ladder where he climbs to the room and jumps off with his hang glider, still in blue checked Pjs but now floating through the canyons as a modern day Icarus heading toward the sun but instead, he lands in the forest where two paths lead into the woods. He takes the unpaved one and bush whacks to the cave where the fire, the shadows, and a pizza delivery scooter await him with a ham and pineapple "Hawaiian" pizza.)

Tales of Ill Repute

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wrote a number of these stories on Google+ as writing excercises. The truth is, these stories are a bunch of loose ends and things I don't know what to do with. There are a couple that I'd like to turn into full novels eventually, but we'll see. If I had all my life to write, I wouldn't be able to attack every idea. I stole the cover from an old pulp novel called *The White King*. If this ever actually sells any copies, someone can sue me for that. The phrase "Shem popped Noah in the keester" was originally said by Sgt. Cheney Wilson while sitting in the radar room playing spades. I wish I had all of his stories on video.

Where people exist, problems exist.

~Vago Damitio

Kalalau, 2004

1 IN THE BEGINNING

We might as well start at the beginning. The bible is a very dirty book, I thought it might be fun to make it dirtier.

Genesis 1

Adam opened his eyes. He'd never felt this bad before. He was lying in a muddy puddle. He stood up and wiped as much water and mud off of him as he could. He wasn't drunk and he knew who had done this to him. It was obvious he had been shanghaied, stripped naked, and dumped in this puddle and there was only one person that could have done it. It was Him.

Now, when I say Him I'm not talking about some distant important personage, I'm talking about Adam. It was Him. Adam is Him. I am Him. You are Him. It's not a sexist universal consciousness, it's just easier for us who are divided to think of God as being a gender even though He is not. This is twice as hard as one might think, because You are actually Him, and You have a gender even though the Him that is You does not have a gender. He is all of you but you are simply a part of Him. Which reminds me....

He wasn't through fucking with Adam. Adam felt a moment of incredible pain in his chest and then he saw his rib tear out of his chest.

"What the fuck?!" he yelled out. "That's my fucking rib!" He moved to the puddle and began mucking through the mud to find his rib and instead he found...well, you know what he found. He found Evelyn. Evelyn was, of course, Him and Adam's rib, and much more.

"Did you see my rib?" he asked her as they lay in the mud together.

"Maybe it's here," she said seductively as she wriggled herself into a more comfortable position under Adam.

They soon forgot all about the rib and it wasn't until much later that Adam said to Eve, "You must be my rib! You're mine." Evelyn pouted and said "Things will go so much better if you don't think of me as an object. I can't belong to anyone but myself. If you pretend I can, it will make us both miserable."

Adam didn't listen. Soon Evelyn grew weary of his delusion of control so she decided to show him for certain that she was not his possession. After all, she was as much Him as he was.

Near the mud puddle they lived in was a tree. In the tree was a sweet talking snake that never really had to hunt because he could talk the food right into his mouth. He had tried to sweet talk Adam and Evelyn, but they were harder to fool than the other creatures around them.

"Snake," she said, "When Adam returns to the puddle, I want you to pretend that you have charmed me away from Adam. I want to show him that my heart belongs to whomever it wants to choose and that my person belongs to me alone."

"What's in it for me?" the snake asked. He thought for a moment

and answered before Evelyn could give him a reply. "Never mind, it sounds fun. I can't wait to see how he reacts."

Upon Adam's return they did just as they had planned.

"I'm leaving you Adam and going with Snake. He is a better provider and he doesn't think he owns me. I've been talking with him and I think it will be much better."

Snake poked his head out of the tree. "Oh, it will be much better. Come on Honey. Come on up into the tree."

The feeling in Adam was new to him. A rage and pain that didn't have a specific point of origin or departure. He was jealous.

"Very well. You can have her Snake. Come down so I can congratulate you." Snake didn't believe him. "Come closer to the tree," he said.

Adam did. Evelyn saw that something wasn't right. "Wait!" she screamed. Her shout perhaps made a bad situation worse. Snake pulled back and struck towards Adam just as Adam jumped forward. Snake's body wrapped around Adam's body and Adam began to bite the snake. Adam was taking huge bites of the Snake as the Snake squeezed the life out of him. Finally, neither could go on. It was the Snake that was losing blood while Adam had lost his oxygen.

Finally, Snake dropped from the tree and Evelyn ran over and began to hit Snake with a stick. It was too much. Snake slithered into the woods leaving a red trail of blood behind.

Adam slowly recovered with the nursing of Evelyn. He never did stop feeling that she was really his, but he had to at least make her think he didn't.

Now that they had an enemy, it was no longer to live exposed, so they built a house, cut down the trees right around it and even

started to wear clothes and shoes to provide a buffer against any bites from Snake and to prevent getting slivers from their new wooden house and furniture.

As for Snake. Snake was Him too. All is Him. Him is One...and All.

Genesis 2

It wasn't a real good start. Right off the bat they started with possession issues. It's not surprising that they were possessive of their children too. First, little Cain was born. Evelyn wouldn't let go of him until the second little devil came along. With the birth of Abel, Cain was kicked off of Evelyn's tit. Somehow even with the coming of all the girl children that followed, she never could bring herself to part with Abel.

Thus, Cain grew up seeking his father's attention and Abel never lacked for his mother and sister's adoration. As they grew up, the differences between them grew more pronounced. Cain hunted snakes and other beasts with his father while Abel took care of sheep, gardened, and basically grew up to be a very feminine sort of man.

There being no women aside from their sisters and mother, Cain and Abel lusted after those women near them. Evelyn brought both boys out of virginity while Adam was hunting. After this, there was no time when Evelyn wasn't pregnant with yet another daughter. Eventually, Adam came home and found Cain back at Evelyn's tit. His feelings of jealousy over the snake had never gone away, but he hadn't thought to be jealous of his boys before. Cain barely escaped with his life. Through this lesson, Cain also

learned to be jealous.

When Cain caught Abel banging their mother, he too, gave the perpetrator a beating. At this point, Adam returned. While he was still bothered, he was less so than when Cain had been fucking Evelyn.

“That’s it boys. From now on, no one fucks your mother but me. You’ve got sisters after all. Look, they are fertile. I’ve already gotten several of them pregnant while you’ve been fucking your mother.”

Adam laughed when he realized his young sons hadn’t even considered fucking their sisters yet. “They’ll learn”, he thought to himself.

And learn they did. Soon there was not a woman that could bear children that wasn’t pregnant. That was when disaster happened. Cain came back from hunting and found Abel pumping away on their mother.

“You are disobeying our father!” Cain screamed in a jealous rage and before anyone could do anything, he had smote Abel with his hunting club. Abel’s head of golden hair split open and the life leaked out of him despite the best efforts of Evelyn and her daughters. When Adam returned he called Cain to him.

“What the fuck? You killed your brother? This is totally fucked. Go. Just get out of here. Take a couple of your sisters and hit the road Cain. I mean, I understand your anger, but you can’t just go killing people just because they are fucking your mother.

And so Cain left with his sisters Bree and Lila. They traveled for many weeks until Cain found a spot that

offered fresh water, plenty of game, and lots of raw materials to build a future with. We'll find out about that future later.

For right now we are left with Adam, Evelyn, fifteen pregnant daughters, and the corpse of Abel. Abel was the first death and no one really knew what to do.

"Should we cut the meat off of him Papa?" one of the girls asked him.

"No" Evelyn shouted. "Take him to the meadow and bury his body. I want to visit him, but I don't want to smell him rotting or see anything eat him. I'll plant some flowers on the grave and we can remember him that way."

Adam grumbled thinking it was silly to throw away so much meat, but he knew that making Evelyn mad would be worse than the meat was worth. He buried the body in the meadow and all the girls came and sang songs that Abel had liked. Adam found himself feeling pretty sad that his gentle little boy was dead. The songs reminded him of the good times they had had together and he began to cry.

Genesis 3

Quite a lot of time went by. From the fifteen pregnant girls came eight boys and seven girls. Since Adam had already forbidden sex with one's mother, he figured the best way to avoid jealousy problems was to arrange the marriages of each of them right off. He knew they would still sleep with whomever they wanted, but figured that by making them

think they owned one another, it would avoid problems like what had happened with Cain and Abel. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. One of the boys was left with no choice but to marry one of his aunts. Soon another of his aunts joined them, and then another. In other cases the mothers of the daughters were moving into the bedrooms with their daughters and their husbands.

From one had come two and from two had come seventeen and from those seventeen came one hundred, from the hundred came the thousands, and from the thousands came the ten thousand. Before long there were people all over the place building houses, clearing land, and getting in arguments with one another. Eventually Evelyn stopped getting pregnant and her and Adam would sit together next to the grave of Abel and look out at the thousands of smoking fires surrounding them.

"What have we done?" Adam asked.

"That fucking snake tricked us Adam. He made us angry and he made us scared. Now look what we've done. There are people everywhere and they are all fucking and fighting and doing horrible things to one another. They're taking each other's wives and sheep and even killing each other. It's awful."

"Evelyn," Adam asked "Do you ever wonder what happened to Cain?"

"Sure," she said "I think about him all the time. He was our first."

"Maybe we should have let him stay," Adam said.

"Too late now," Evelyn said. "He'll turn up soon I bet. All

these others are spreading out so fast that they are sure to raise Cain soon.”

Adam laughed and snorted the goats milk he was drinking. “That’s a good one Evelyn. Raising Cain. Ha-ha.”

On that night, in a fit of passion, Evelyn became pregnant yet again with a son that they called Seth. Eventually, the children of Adam and Evelyn had mastered the nature of reality. They had figured out how to manifest what they desired, how to transform the world, and how to manipulate matter. They existed in a high civilization that lacked for nothing except the solution to the self inflicted problems of humanity: greed and jealousy. What one person had, the other wanted. Some were more adept and getting and keeping what they wanted than others, but no one lacked what they needed.

While Adam and Evelyn lived, they were visited by many of their descendants. Many of them wanted to know what the world was like before they existed and even before Adam existed. Adam had no answers, but he understood that they were not actually separate from God. He tried to explain this, but he was misunderstood. The most able at putting resources to work in the new society decided that the only way to get to the truth was to bring all the pieces of God together. In order to get the people to all come to one place, they told them that they were going to build a huge tower that would allow people to reach the heavens and speak with God.

Adam suggested that it was a bad idea and refused to give permission but when he and Evelyn finally died, a grandchild of theirs named Chelonian took control. Chelonian called all of the people to come to the funeral of Adam and Evelyn and while they were there, he told them

that they must build the tower as a monument to their ancestors and so that Adam and Evelyn could return and continue to rule them. Chelonian was persuasive. His mother was a child of Adam and Evelyn and there was some question as to who his father was. He had Abel's fair good looks, Cain's temper, and Adam's firm jaw. Many thought that he must be the third son of Adam. While there were certainly others who could have been Adam's sons, Chelonian was the one most recognized as such. The truth is that there was so much fucking going on between Cain, Abel, and Adam that no one was sure who was who's father. Thus, descent was generally claimed through one's mother. All that was certain was that Adam had bore two sons to Evelyn and no more.

Thus, Chelonian was positioned as the highest ranking member of the human race upon the death of Adam. While any of the daughters of Adam might have claimed a superior position, they were uninterested since they were kept busy with birthing, mothering, grand-mothering, and more. And so it was that all the people of the world, except for the descendants of Cain, came together at the grave of Adam, Evelyn, and Cain to build a tower that would bring their ancestors back to them and allow them to understand God.

They called the place the Plain of Babel, which is the name Adam had given it after the death of Abel. While the tower was being built, Chelonian burned incense and had thousands of people chant to the great unknown. Gradually, the tower grew bigger and the chanting grew louder and slowly came together to create primal sounds, the keys to unlocking the mysteries that hold reality together. One must remember that in the beginning was God and God was the word and when the word was

spoken, the heavens fused, the stars were born, the earth came into existence, and man was born. An instant to God but an eternity to man who has existed but an instant of that eternal instant.

As the chanting became more focused it started to grow more powerful. The primal sounds began to unwrap the secret sounds that held reality in its illusionary form. As Chelonian climbed the tower, he began to understand the truth. Nothing existed but the one and by revealing that truth to the world, nothing would exist. The tower and the chanting must be stopped if existence was to continue. Perhaps, it would have been a good thing to have the world melt into the primal force of the Universe, but Chelonian was unwilling to allow his 'self' to disappear. He could see clearly that the sounds they were heading towards were going to melt his ego into the egoless.

Calling his high priests together, Chelonian gave them instructions to change the chanting in subtle ways. The work on the Tower of Babel had gone too far to stop it, but it could be sabotaged. At this point, Chelonian wasn't sure if what he was doing made him a hero or a villain, but he saw that the best way to prevent reality from being healed was to scatter humanity across the face of the planet and build in impediments towards them ever working together on a project of this nature again.

As the tones being chanted changed, the tower began to shake and the sky darkened. The people took the modified chants of the priests and redoubled their efforts and suddenly the sky was blackened. Darkness like that of a cave descended upon the masses gathered in Babylon and the chanting came to a stop. When the darkness lifted, Chelonian could see that the people had changed. Some of them had grown tall, others had become diminutive.

Some had grown of darker complexion and others of lighter. Differences that before had been subtle were now seen in sharp contrast.

Chelonian heard a collective gasp and then the words started again. No more were there unified voices chanting primal sounds, but instead the voices of a thousand tongues spoke for the first time. Like was drawn to like and soon surrounding the tower were the twelve nations of the world. Missing was the thirteenth nation, that of Cain and his sisters who had not taken part in the building of the tower and thus still spoke the primal language of God.

The tower shook as each of the nations tried to claim it for themselves. Chelonian himself alone on the tower and though he called out for peace, none of the twelve nations understood him. His wives and children had been cast asunder to the various nations. As the tower began to rock, Chelonian captured the essence of God which remained and used it to grow wings which enabled him to slide between the imagined reality of the masses and the true reality of God.

As the tower crashed, the men and women of the twelve nations saw a creature with wings of fire that slid between the crumbling stones and into the ground. The peoples of the world then scattered across the face of the planet. One nation stayed near the ruins of the tower and began to worship the God of the fiery wings that lived below.

Genesis 4

Seth fathered many children and his descendents were really a no good bunch, except for one of them, way down the line. His name was Noah and he didn't like people much, but he liked animals a lot. Eventually, he met a woman who had similar tastes and the two brought in wounded and hungry animals to their lands and pretty soon they had a regular little zoo. On cold nights they found warmth in each others company and soon they had fathered three sons.

The weather was getting pretty bad by the time that the boys got older and having lived for a long time, Noah had continually built on his house until it was pretty big. When it flooded he built a wooden floor into it and when the floods started ruining the pens where all the animals lived, Noah decided to bring the beasts inside the house. It was about this time that the rain didn't stop. It just kept raining until there was a standing puddle on the ground. All the animal feces in the house had filled in the cracks in Noah's floor pretty well and when the water got high enough, his house started to float.

Lots of Noah's neighbors wanted in, but he would have none of it and so it was just Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives that floated away with all the animals. As a result of all the time they had spent with the beasts, the humans had all come to relate to one beast or another pretty well and in order to talk with each other the humans had to take on some of the characteristics of the beast that whomever they spoke with liked best. It's the reason why today, most people seem wolfish, hawkish, dovish, sheepish, cowlike, or mouselike.

Finally, the rain stopped and the house got stuck on an exposed mountain. Noah planted some grapes and it wasn't long before he had made some wine. Noah and his

family were stranded pretty far away from the rest of humanity and they were convinced that only they had survived the flood. One night, after drinking far too much, Noah passed out in the tent and Shem came upon him. Shem had been drinking too and when he saw his fathers plump rear end sticking in the air, he was overcome with the desire to pop Noah in the keester. He did so and then ran away. Noah woke and he knew what had happened. He cursed Shem and all his offspring for the Sodomites they were and this is when Shem and his family went forth and started the city of Sodom.

Meanwhile all these humans and everything else were still little pieces of God. The old drunk Noah lived for a long time and he convinced just about everyone that he met that he was their ancestor. Thus, over time, all men decided that they were descendents of Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Enoch. Each generation was a little less of God than the one before. Thus there was still just one God but more pieces of him than ever before. God just sat back and watched as the pieces of him took on life of their own much like a sick person with a horrible rash watches as it spreads all over their body. The rash is as much a part of them as any other.

In truth, there were widely spread peoples all over the planet by this point and many of them wouldn't have known Noah from Adam. These people had survived the flood and developed ideas of their own. While the names of the original nations have long since disappeared from the public knowledge of man, they are revealed here along with the rough equivalent of their modern counterparts.

Ahshin. - Far East

Kalmir. – Pacific Continent

Mishnar.- Northern Europe

Langra.- Eastern North America

Pornish. – Western North America

Huyap.- Central America

Nardar.- Australia

Ishtal.- Central Asia

Mangwey.- Southern Europe, Medeterrainian

Tzuch.- Southern Africa

Zelfen. – North Africa

Xisha. – South America

And Cainan. – The Middle East

From these tribes grew the nations of the world and from these tribes the nations of the world still receive their power. Behind the nations of the world are these same tribes and the men who rule them. A game of power and control that spans millenniums and concerns not only the fate of all men, but the nature of reality and thus the destruction of it.

One must ask if the destruction of reality is possible since the destruction itself creates a reality in which to destroy. Thus reality cannot be destroyed, but only altered or

changed. The nature of reality rests on awareness of reality. If one is unaware of reality, reality has ceased to exist for that individual, but has reality ceased to exist? Isn't reality always there watching whatever happens to be manifested. Does reality change for the observer and the observed? Is that possible?

After the destruction of the tower, Babylon became one of the great centers of the world. Those who had stayed retained some memory of the true nature of reality and a number of cults sprang up surrounding the bits and pieces of reality that still existed.

Also, from the city of Shem, Sodom, a great metropolis sprang from the plains and a prosperous people were born. Their society was steeped in mysticism and ritual. Gradually, selfish men gained control of the various sects and began to pervert the sacred to their profane wills. A major part of the seeking of control was the subversion of the people into thinking that they were powerless without the help of the priests and soon the government. Make no mistake, government sprang from religion and religion sprang from seeking control. Seeking control required convincing the people that they were dependent and separate weak individuals instead of a part of the greater whole.

Gradually the cults merged until both the government and the cult were one entity perverting the truth so that the few could control the many. Through the many being shackled to this dependency they were unable to fulfill their divine part in the totality of existensis. Complete and fulfilled existensis requires that all people be free to follow the divine course that has always been laid down for them. Each path is glorious and brings great pleasure to God, who is actually all of us. Imagine the sense of joy as the

walker takes the perfect walk and the singer sings the perfect song and then imagine all of humanity feeling that sense of joy and triumph together.

It is only through glorifying the many that we are able to experience the true joy of God.

This was the opposite of the Cult of Sodom which chained all citizens to serving those at the top who had created a false God that existed separately from the people. The false priests of the Golden Calf worshiped a statue they claimed ruled all people. It's name was Ba'al and in truth, it was an externalized representation of the desire to control the many that the few at the top held. Though they may have truly believed in the doctrines they preached, their belief did not make Ba'al a true god. Ba'al was simply a human idea that served to keep the majority of humanity from recognizing that they were a part of the divine and needn't look further than each other to understand All.

The Priests of Ba'al began to use numbers to account for products. Through counting and trading they soon developed a shorthand that allowed goods to change hands without exchanging goods physically. Those who held the goods issued tokens representing the goods and soon they began to loan out more tokens than they had goods on the promise that the borrower would return more than he had loaned. On the first day that such a transaction took place, usury was born and it was an affront to God. To promise more than you possess and take more than you loan is to empty the worth of the work or lives of human beings. By doing so, this system of interest allows for the robbing of the poor or uneducated. The birth of the coin was neutral but the birth of charging interest was obscene.

Through interest and the manipulation of wealth, the many were enslaved to the few and soon there were none in Sodom that did not work for the Golden Calf and those who controlled it. None except for Lot. Lot refused to take more than he could give in return and refused to leave the path that had been laid before him. Lot was a weaver and his rugs were prized for their design and fineness. Though he could have charged more for his work than other weavers, he kept his prices only as high as he needed them to be to provide his family with the things he needed. His wife tried to convince him to sell them for more so that they could enjoy more of the gifts of the Golden Calf, but each time he sold a blanket or cloak, he would only charge as much as he needed to continue weaving and feeding his family.

When God looked upon Sodom and saw that the people had been sucked of their souls and those at the top were drunk with power and wealth, he decided to utterly destroy the city and leave no stone standing. And then he saw Lot, giving away a rug that could have been sold for a huge profit to an old woman with no money. As the old woman walked away, a light flashed in front of Lot and a voice told him, "Leave this city and never look back for it is the birthplace of the worst sin of man. Leave now and never look back or you will be destroyed.

Lot grabbed his wife and children and their neighbors next door and they began to flee into the night. Lot warned them all not to look back, but such was the curiosity of his wife that she looked back and instantly turned to salt. As for Sodom, the myth was eroded and the money became worthless as all realized that it had been illusion in the first place. The loss of Sodom was nearly complete except for those who escaped with Lot.

There's a **Lot** more to tell....

2 MENEHUNE TALE

Most visitors to Hawaii don't realize that the first people to live on the islands have disappeared into the mist of the rainforest.

The giant warriors landed in their canoes and stood on the beach. Ke'eali'i hid behind the hala tree watching in awe. One warrior would have been enough to give him nightmares for the rest of his life, but what he saw went way beyond nightmares.

Dozens of the warriors worked together to pull their massive outrigger canoes high above the waterline while equally giant women began to disembark with baskets loaded with chickens, rats, dogs, and plants. He watched in awe as six giant men pulled a tiki from the center of the canoe and planted it in the sand. When they shifted it to face the cliffs that circled high above, the sunlight seemed to bring it to life. The tiki was even more terrifying than the men who held it and Ke'eali'i felt his breath stop as all of the assembled giants set their baskets around their god and then lay face down on the sands around it.

As much as he wanted to see what would happen next, he knew that this was perhaps his only chance to slip away into the jungle without the warriors seeing his movement. Once he was far enough away that he thought they would no longer hear him he broke into a run. He needed to get

back to his village. He needed to warn his family. He needed to let his people know. The Tahitians had come to Hawai'i.

Although Ke'eali'i had never seen Tahitians before, he and everyone in his village knew what they were. His people had fled the Marquessan islands three hundred years before and followed migrating birds over three thousand miles across the vast blue ocean to escaped overcrowding, famine, and nearly constant warfare from marauding Tahitians. They were the Menehune and while they had hoped that their enemies would never come this far and disrupt the new lives they had built for themselves on the most isolated islands on the planet, they had kept alive the stories that told why they had come.

Marquessan society had been a brutal existence before the arrival of the Tahitians. It had become much worse after. Ke'eali'i and his people knew what to expect now that the giant warriors had landed on the sands of Kahana Bay.

The tallest of the Menehune stood no more than five feet tall while the smallest of the Tahitians stood over six and a half feet. The largest of the Tahitians were over seven feet tall and it was why in their distant homeland, the Tahitians had begun to call them the Menehune, or the little people. Soon after initial contact Tahitians had begun to enslave the Menehune and force them to use their long honed stone building skills to construct temples and fishponds. Many had died.

Faced with superior numbers, decreased land for agriculture, and constant warfare Ke'eali'i's most revered ancestors had decided that they would take their small tribe and set off to find a new home. Golden winged birds

came to the Marquessas each winter and each spring flew north to an unknown nesting ground. It was these birds they followed into the uncharted and unknown.

Carrying calabashes filled with fresh water and seeds; and bringing yams and taro, the Marquessans had spent months living upon fish and rainwater while they continued towards the stars to which the golden winged birds had flown. After much hardship and the loss of many lives, a sharp eyed woman had seen the pale hint of green reflecting onto the stationary white clouds that filled the horizon.

Of the nearly one thousand that had set out on this voyage of desperation, less than two hundred had lived to see the abundant reefs and bird filled jungles of this land that they had built a new civilization upon. A chain of islands that filled their every need and that no human foot had ever trod upon. This gift from the Gods was the reward for all they had suffered and over the next three centuries they began anew to create a society that honored those Gods and utilized the heavenly resources that had been bestowed upon them.

They had multiplied and now numbered in the thousands, though they were spread out on the eight largest islands. It was a loosely knit culture composed of a dozen lush valleys occupied by a dozen peaceful tribes. Each tribe existing in isolation from the others throughout the year except for the ten days of longest daylight during which members of all tribes gathered here in the Kahana Valley to celebrate the coming of their ancestors to this place of peace.

As Ke'eali'i ran to his village, he knew that their time of peace had come to an end. The last celebration had ended

three cycles of the moon ago and if the legends were true, it would be the last time that the Menehune gathered openly with one another and feasted in peace and plenty. The Tahitians, their enemies, had arrived.

At the time of the arrival of the Menehune, the sharp eyed woman who had first spotted land was honored with the title of high chief. It was a custom that was new in a land that was new. In their old lands it had been the men-warriors who had ruled. Here it was the women-growers that determined what was necessary for the good of the people. The new female chiefs had placed their focus upon the Gods of growing, the Gods of birth, and the Gods of life magic. This change created an entirely new society from the one they had left behind which was ruled by the Gods of hunting, the Gods of death, and the Gods of killing magic.

As a result, the Tahitians did not find spear and club armed warriors waiting for them when they marched back into the valleys of the Menehune. Instead they found abandoned villages with houses that were too small for them to comfortably use, they found hastily harvested gardens, and they found massive temples dedicated to life and fertility and constructed solely for the purpose of gratitude. They did not see any of the Menehune and they were not met with violence. The still smoldering cooking fires were populated only by birds that scavenged the edges of the villages, looking for morsels that had been left behind in the orderly departure of an entire culture.

For a superstitious people who gloried in the violence of warfare and who looked to their Gods to bring death to their enemies, these abandoned places raised great fear. Rumors circulated among the warriors that they had come to the land of ghosts. Those warriors who wandered into

the woods alone sometimes did not return and those who did told of hearing strange sounds as they walked through empty bamboo thickets.

Each time the Tahitians found a fertile valley they also found abandoned temples and villages and each time they would raze them in the hope that their Gods were stronger than those of the people who had so mysteriously vanished. As more Tahitians came and more Tahitian villages were founded the stories of the little people who lived in the little houses became more complex. Rather than destroying the fishponds and temples of the Menehune, the Tahitians began to use them and stories emerged that those who could best the Menehune in games of wit were able to pay for the construction of the massive stone works left behind for the price of a single shrimp.

With the villages burned and the evidence of the actual size of the Menehune no longer evident, the legends made them even smaller than their actual size. The deep valleys and high mountain swamps became places that no Tahitian would dare to go and for a time the Menehune were able to continue their existence in the high and dark places without fear of interference from the people below who were in the process of evolving from Tahitians into Hawaiians.

Ke'eali'i, hadn't known what the reaction would be when he brought word to the village that their ancient enemies had landed. A part of him had hoped that they would fight. He, like all young men of the Menehune, had grown up having mock battles where the Tahitians landed and they, brave warriors that they saw themselves to be, would fight to the

death to preserve their new homeland. As he came into the village he looked lovingly on the grass huts, fish drying racks, and carefully tended gardens. Several of his friends tried to stop him to ask why he was in such a hurry but he ignored them and instead ran directly to the hut of the high chief, his grandmother.

High Chief Puka Pohaku had never known the Tahitians. Her grandmother had been one of the original refugees from the sea. She had heard tales of the murder, rape, and destruction of their people when they came into contact with the Tahitians. She had, with the high chiefs of other valleys long considered the possibility that they might someday be faced with these menacing giants again. While it was easy to forget that the old stories were true, such was not the life of a high chief. She, and the others like her, had a plan. They were not going to watch history repeat itself here. Things would not happen the same way in this place.

Ke'eali'i came into her hut, out of breath and she knew before he began to speak that the time had come. The life of ease they had become accustomed to was about to end.

"Honored Grandmother," the boy said, breathing in gasps. "On the beach, I saw, I saw..."

"I know what you have seen for the stars have foretold that this time would come. You have done well Grandson, to come to me with haste. Now we must prepare..."

"Should I gather the men and get weapons..." the boy was flush with fear and excitement.

"No!" She spoke sternly, perhaps too sternly, judging by

the instant deflation of the boy in front of her. "This is not the way that we have prepared for these times. You will go to each hut and tell them to come to me. Have the young people do the same as you and tell all of the adults to gather. Waste no time Grandson for time is something that we no longer can take for granted. Send youths to the high gardens and out to the fishponds and tell everyone that the worst thing they can do is to be seen by the invaders. They must not see us or all will be lost."

The boy bowed and left to do as she told him. She had a moment of concern that he might be tempted to engage with the warriors but it was only a moment. He was a good, sensible boy and like all of her people, respected her wisdom. He had done good to come to her before telling anyone else.

In a short time, the adults in the village had gathered around her. More would be coming from the high gardens and the fishponds but she could not wait for them. They would learn of what was happening as they arrived.

"My people", she said to the gathered mass around her, "Today, our ancient enemies have landed on the beaches to the east of us."

Instantly there were exclamations of grief and rage. She silenced them with a wave of her hand. Most of them anyway.

"We will fight and kill them before they can get reinforcements." This came from Lokahi, the leader of the men. She had expected it.

"We will not." Her voice stood firm and solid above the excited murmurs of the crowd and stopped Lokahi where

he had turned to begin rallying the men. "We do not have time to waste and every hand and body is needed if we are to survive. Do not forget that in our ancient homeland we had many more warriors than we have here. Still our people were forced to flee. We will not be condemned to making the mistakes of the past."

Lokahi was stopped but not convinced. "Would you have us wait for them to enslave us?" His concern was real and he was not alone in it. She could see in the faces of all who had gathered that there was fear, confusion, and in some cases anger.

"Do not worry my people. Long have we known that this day would come. I and the high chiefs before me have considered how we might best survive and we are certain that the Gods would not have brought us to this land only to let it be taken from us. This is the time when we are tested by fire. Do we stand with the Gods of Life or do we fall back to the Gods of Death. I can tell you that the Tahitians are in favor with the Gods of Death and if we call on them to help us, all is lost. Trust in the wisdom of your leaders. Trust in the love of your Gods."

Lokahi was still speaking for the fears of the people. "What would you have us do? You certainly can't expect us to sit and wait for destruction."

She forced a calm and melodious laugh. It spread over the fear of her people like a cool trade wind dissipating the angry smoke of a volcano. "Do not fear, my people. Fear is for those who have come to disrupt our way of life. Fear is the friend that we send to do our bidding. Laughter is the magic that will save us and send our enemies from the lands we will live in."

“We will survive and we will prosper, but for now, we must leave this place. Gather our preserved foods and medicines. Bring your tools. Take what you can carry for now we will leave this place of ease and comfort and move to the high wet places. We do not have much time. Do not lament over what we leave behind but only laugh to know that what we leave behind will inspire fear in our enemies and create protection for us without the loss of a single life. Now, move and make haste for our time in this place is at an end. As the people come from the fishponds and high gardens, tell them what has happened. Do not carry fear, trust in our Gods.”

She turned her back on them and began to put the many herbs and medicines that were drying near her hut into hala baskets and calabash gourds. She moved with quiet deliberation and ignored the few questions that came her way. Most of her people followed her example and moved to similar tasks, but not Lokahi.

“High Chief, respectfully I choose to tell you that I think we should fight. By giving them this land with no blood, we encourage them to take more and more. This land was our gift from the Gods.”

Straightening up from where she was wrapping dried kamani bark into tea leaves, the old woman looked at this strong and angry man in front of her.

“Do you trust our Gods so little that you think they would allow this to be taken from us with no blood Lokahi? The Tahitians will spill their own blood. The fear that our Gods put in them will cause them to slaughter their own people. Trust in the Gods Lokahi, trust in your Chiefs, look inside yourself and you will know that what I say is true.”

Ke'eali'i did as he was told. He took his duty seriously and young people were soon enroute to the distant gardens and fishponds. Ke'eali'i ran up the slick trails to the high gardens with the ease of youth and the concentration of a warrior. The high gardens were located up the sides of the narrow valley and thus cooler and wetter than the lands below, capturing the rain and mist from storms as the Gods held clouds over the mountains to bring the water of life to the Menehune below. As he ran into the banana patches he caught sight of his father stripping banana leaves from a plant that had already borne its fruit.

His father, seeing the boy coming towards him smiled briefly before noticing the firm set of his son's usually smiling mouth. He stood from where he had been working, straightening his back and standing to his full height of nearly five feet. He was a tall man among the Menehune, but as he stood, Ke'eali'i noted how small and vulnerable he looked in comparison to the giant tattooed warriors he had so recently seen on the beaches of Kahana.

"Father," he huffed, "The Tahitians have landed and the high chief is calling for everyone to return to the village at once." With the message delivered the boy let some of his fear seep out of his being, "They are so big Father. I saw them on the beach, their God is terrible to look at, I'm afr..."

Kalihi stopped his son's words by putting his hand on the boy's head. It was a rare gesture of affection from the usually severe man who demanded that the boy learn all of the skills necessary for life among the Menehune faster than any of his peers. The boy stopped mid-word.

"Go and tell the other men and women. Did she tell you what she means to do?" This was asked in a way that told

Kalihi that he did not expect his son to have any more information.

The boy shook his head no, then thought that perhaps he should tell his father what he knew. "She said that we will not attack them. I don't know what she plans..."

His father smiled. "We are lucky to have her. She is wise. Don't worry my son, the Gods have prepared us for this day. Our chiefs have long known it would come. Today is just another day for you to learn the ways of our people and our Gods. Now hurry."

With that, Kalihi turned his back on Ke'eali'i and began to roll the banana leaves he had already stripped. The boy watched in amazement.

"Father, aren't you going to go there now?"

His father laughed. "Do you think we will need these less now that the Tahitians have arrived? Remember my son, that work interrupted does not mean that one should abandon work already done. Trust in the Gods, do as the High Chief has told you, and I will see you in the village soon."

The boy moved away to do as he was told but his father stopped him once more.

"I know that she is your grandmother and that she has been gentle with you and that sometimes you think that I have been harsh, but I want you to know one thing, my mother is as strong as the strongest koa tree and as wise as the stars that she studies so carefully. When I was a boy, she was twice as hard on me as I am on you. Sometimes so harsh that I considered leaving to another

valley, but I have learned as the cycles of the moon pass that each lesson she insisted on prepared me for what was to come next. Do not worry my son, the fiercest God of the Tahitians is no match for our High Chief. She knows what she is doing.”

And so it was that the new exodus began. Before night had fallen, all of the people of the village had done as they were told. Leaving their fires burning and the bulk of their tools and ornaments behind, they followed High Chief Puka Pohaku as she led them deep into the valley and up the jagged walls of the mighty Ko’olau Mountains. Much of their food, medicine, and possessions came with them, wrapped in the banana leaves that Kalihi and the other gardeners had thought to bring back with them from the high gardens that now lay below them. Runners had been dispatched to the other tribes of the Menehune on Oahu and the swiftest paddlers were on their way to neighbor islands so that all of the Menehune would know that the Tahitians had arrived.

3 LUCKY BALDWIN AND THE INDIANS

This is probably the most likely candidate of all these stories for a full novel. I had a blast writing this. Life got in the way though...

Most people thought Lucky was a nickname, but for Lucky Baldwin it was actually the name his parents had given him. Not that he ever corrected the assumption when folks made it. He'd found that if people thought you were lucky, they were more likely to take a shine to you. 'Sides, it wasn't as if he were unlucky.

Far from it. I mean sure, you could say that there was nothing lucky about having your entire family massacred by Comanche Indians, but, on the other hand, he was the only one to survive. He always liked what his adopted father used to tell him with regards to luck. Luck was a matter of knowing how best to use a particular situation to one's own advantage.

So, while he watched other youngsters run out and futilely try to attack the Comanche as they killed all the white folks, Lucky did as his Ma had told him and stayed hidden under the blankets until everyone was dead. Everyone but him and the Indians that is. Once they had put away all their weapons and started searching for loot, ten year old Lucky figured it was better to announce his survival to them

rather than have it discovered.

He also figured that there wasn't much point in crying or begging for sympathy since the men who were now laughing and drinking the wagon train's whiskey were the same one's that had just killed everyone in it. So, he took a couple of breaths, made sure he wasn't going to cry, and then stood up in the back of the wagon.

He'd already figured out who the boss was among the Indian fighters. The boss was a giant of a man wearing a vest made out of an old horse blanket and a pair of old blue cavalry pants. His eyes were the darkest black that Lucky had ever seen and his skin just a shade lighter. His only adornment was a strip of yellow and red silk that was tied around his right arm. Most of the other fighters had a lot more decoration. The boss didn't need it. He was decoration enough without it.

Lucky jumped down from the wagon before anyone noticed he was alive and managed to get within about six feet of the boss before he spoke.

"Senor," Lucky said as confidently as he could, "I'd like you to teach me how to fight as well as you do, seein' as how you just killed everyone I ever looked up to." He gulped and stood his ground as a dozen Indians looked at him in varying degrees of surprise. The leader turned and looked at him.

The big man stared at him for a moment and then said "Aren't you upset about that little white boy? That we just killed your family."

Lucky was upset about it. It was silly to even consider otherwise, but he'd never really understood why people

allowed their emotions to make a bad situation worse. Now was a good time to say so.

“Ain’t gonna do me no good to be upset about it, is it? On the other hand, you teaching me how to fight might actually help me out at some point later on so I don’t have to ever see the people around me dying again. ‘Sides, I’m part Injun too. My grandma was a Cherokee in North Carolina.”

The men around him laughed and the big man in front of him allowed a grin to slide across his face.

“When are you pale face ever gonna learn that before the white man came here, the Cherokee was the white man. Far as I can see, being Cherokee just makes you whiter, White Boy.”

The war chief stepped closer to him and put his big hand on top of Lucky’s head. He clenched his fist into Lucky’s red hair and lifted the boy off the ground.

“I think we should probably kill you now, it might be better for you to die a quick death than to suffer the way we do. Laughing Cactus, hand me that knife of yours.”

Lucky struggled not to make a sound as the big man spun him in a circle while suspending him by his hair. The laughter of the men kept him from crying out. Lucky figured if he were going to die, he would do it silently.

As he spun back in the other direction, he saw that the chief had the knife of Laughing Cactus in his hand now. He braced himself for the pain he knew was coming.

“What’s your name little white boy? The spirits will want to know before they let you into the Cherokee heaven where

Jesus lives.” More laughter.

“I’m Lucky,” Lucky yelled. “Lucky God Damn Baldwin.”

The laughter became hysterical and he saw the knife flashing towards him in the sunlight. Then he found himself lying on the ground and looking up to where the chief held a handful of long red hair in one hand and a sharp knife in the other.

“I guess you are lucky. You’ve been scalped, but I seem to have missed the scalp part. I guess that means the Great Spirit wants you to stay with us. By the way, there’s no such thing as being lucky. It’s all about how you turn a situation to your advantage.”The Chief gestured expansively to the massacre around them.

Lucky never knew whether his new adopted father had missed him on purpose or because he was laughing and drunk. For that matter, he never figured much about what was going on in the mind of the man either. Was he referring to Lucky making the most of the situation or he and his braves making the most out of a situation? Maybe both.

Lucky looked up at him. “My name is Lucky. What’s your name, Senor? What should I call you?”

The Chief looked down at him with that big smile again. “My name? I’m Chief Little Bird and these are my band of Merry Robins, but I guess you should call me Dad.”

4 TAHA THE CAB DRIVER

My wife used to accuse me of not understanding Moroccan mentality. One day I read her this story but didn't tell her I wrote it. She was sure it was written by a Moroccan. When I told her I wrote it, she didn't apologize or congratulate me she just said "Am I supposed to be Fatima?"

Taha the cabdriver wasn't having a good day. Upon waking, his wife Fatima demanded money so that she could buy food to feed the half dozen relatives who had come to visit from the Rif mountains. He tried to tell her that he had no money, but she had already been through the pockets of his jacket where he had carelessly left his earnings from the night before. After arguing for nearly an hour about the fact that he needed to buy gas, pay for a new taxi license, and get his car tuned up he ended up leaving his house with only about a hundred dirham of the three hundred he had previously held. Of course, none of his excuses were true. Fatima knew that, but to just give her the money went against his nature. After all, if he gave her nothing, she would spend nothing. If he gave her all of the money, she would spend all the money. Such was the nature of life. However, in this case, it had apparently been written that he would leave the house with only a third of his money. The rest would be used to show hospitality to his wife's relatives even though it was unlikely that they would ever have the hospitality returned since the relatives

were poor even by Rif standards.

After having his coffee and reading the newspaper in the cafe where most of the cabdrivers gathered each morning he only had a forty dirham left because it had been his misfortune to run into a man who he owed 100 dirham to and the wily fox had seen him pay for his coffee with the hundred dirham note Fatima had left him with. Taha had escaped giving the man only fifty. The morning had gotten worse from there with nothing but short fares and complaining Moroccans who all claimed to have less than the fares he requested.

Returning to his home for the afternoon meal, he found Fatima irritable and that her family had already eaten most of the food she and his daughters had prepared. The guests had demanded lunch earlier than usual, no doubt in order to keep Taha from eating with them and thus to get more than they would have with one more mouth present. Fatima had saved him a plate of cold tajine with only the barest scraps of chicken.

After lunch, things were similar to the morning and finally as the evening came, he decided to take a chance on fleecing some Spanish tourists arriving on the ferry from Tarifa. Of late, many drivers had been complaining that the Spaniards had become even more cheap than usual and so he had stuck with Moroccan business people in the Ville Nouvelle. On this day, it wasn't working out very well.

Since he was not a usual at the Tangier port, he was given many nasty stares and more than a few harsh words by those who made this their regular route. He noted that most of the walk off passengers were returning Moroccans and that the majority of Spaniards had brought their own cars. Those few Spaniards who did wander off either

ignored him or went with touts who spoke better Spanish. It was his misfortune to have studied English rather than Spanish at the Lycee. Not that his English was good, but his Spanish was far worse being limited to Senor and Hola.

After nearly all the other drivers had left he looked up to see a Spaniard coming down the ramp from immigration. Sometimes being patient paid off. The man was average height and to the delight of Taha he was not a backpacker. He carried a leather shoulder bag and dragged a small wheeled suitcase behind him. On his head he wore a hat which to Taha marked him as prosperous, a brown fedora such as the bankers in Tangier often wore.

"Hola Senor." Taha said hopefully. "Taxi?"

"Lla," the man replied in very poorly accented Arabic. "Shukran."

"Takallum a laura Arabiya?" Taha said in his friendliest tone.

"Lla, Shukran" the man said again. It was obvious this was the only Arabic he knew.

Taha tried to speak to the man in Darija, in French, and then asked if he was Spanish, but the only really he got was the one he had already heard as the man walked quickly away from him.

The only other person coming off the ferry was a Moroccan soldier. Soldiers rarely tipped, but Taha decided he would rather have a fare than none. He began speaking to the man, found out he was going to the bus station, and offered to take him there for the usual fare, about six dirhams.

As he started the taxi he saw the foreigner, whom he now doubted to be Spanish getting money from an ATM machine. It was an opportunity too good to pass up. The man would not have change and probably didn't know how much a taxi should cost. The banks had been good to drivers and merchants by making the ATMs dispense mostly 200 dirham notes. He stopped his cab, got out, and approached the foreigner deciding to try speaking English to him.

"You need taxi?" he asked as he opened the back door. The soldier was in the front seat looking through his paperwork.

The man looked around and it apparently dawned on him that there were now no other taxis at the port.

"I need to go to the train station," the man said.

Aha! He spoke English.

"Oh, very far to the station and too late, maybe you need nice hotel here in Tangier for tonight?"

The nicer hotels gave generous commissions to any drivers that brought them guests.

"Lla, shukran." The man's Arabic annoyed Taha. It was already 6 pm and the trains wouldn't run again until 9 pm this evening. It seemed a shame to just take the man to the train station.

"Okay, maybe you eat now. No trains now." The man looked a bit panicked at this but he was coming to the cab with Taha at last.

"No. Just the train. Shukran." Taha had changed his mind

about the man being wealthy. There was something almost shabby about him. He was unshaven and smelled strongly of cigarettes and sweat. Taha could see why he had been held up at customs.

As the man began to get in the cab he noticed the soldier in the front seat and pulled back.

"No problem. He goes to same." Taha said soothingly. Foreigners always seemed surprised that they didn't get the cabs to themselves.

"You are English?" he asked. Of course the man was English.

"Ana askoon fil America." His Arabic was awful but apparently he did speak more than just *Ila shukran*.

"Oh, Barack Obama. Muzien!" The soldier in the front seat laughed. He was a negro, obviously from the south of Morocco. He turned and tried to speak to the American in Fusha, standard Arabic. The man didn't understand a word. It was fortunate for Taha since the soldier was telling him that the trains didn't run until 9 pm and that the fare should be about ten dirhams for the cab ride there.

The man nodded as if he understood and the soldier gave up. Taha dropped the soldier at the bus station and was surprised to be given ten dirhams, the fare was only eight dirhams and the soldier had tipped him two. A strange night.

The man seemed concerned that he was being let out at the bus station but Taha reassured him. "You are next. Wait. Sit."

Taha drove several times past the station on side roads and finally when the man seemed to be getting anxious stopped the cab at the train station.

"Shal Faemrik?" the man asked. How old are you? No, he must mean the price.

"150 dirhams," Taha replied. He didn't have enough change to only charge the man the correct amount. It was the will of God.

"Kbeera," the man said with uncertainty. Big. He must mean it was too much, but he didn't know.

"No. It's the right price. Standard. But because soldier being in taxi, I charge you 130 only."

"No, just fifty," the man said. "Hamsareen."

"Lla, one hundred ten." Taha worked hard not to smile.

Finally, after painful negotiations they agreed on a price of seventy five dirhams.

The man held out a blue 200 dirham note looking dubious.

Taha counted out an odd assortment of change, the more change, the less likely the man would notice he was not being given enough back. 7 dirham coins, four 2-dirham coins, three 5-dirham coins, and a 20-dirham note. Taha counted the twenty as a fifty, the fives as tens, the twos as fives, and the ones as twos. "Fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, eighty-five, ninety, ninety-five, one hundred, one hundred ten, one hundred twenty five." At the end, Taha dumped all the coins in the man's hand and moved quickly to go get the man's bag from the back of his cab hoping the man wouldn't count his change and was as unfamiliar with

Moroccan money as Taha thought he was.

The man moved back quickly to make sure his bag was safe and put the fifty dirhams change in his pocket.

Taha smiled as he handed the man his bag. "Welcome to Morocco. Marhabban." Then he moved back to his cab and drove away quickly.

He smiled as he looked in the mirror and saw the foreigner looking at the purple twenty dirham note. It had turned into not such a bad day after all. Now if he could just keep Fatima from finding this money when he got home.

5 MELIPTIMOUS TAGGLE

Just so we're clear, I invented both words. I invented meliptimous to mean when someone does something with an ulterior motive as in "He married her with a meliptimous intent." Taggle is a verb and it means to hear one side of a cell phone conversation. As in, "Guess what I taggled at Starbucks today?" However, I thought both words together create a somewhat startling name that deserved to be fleshed out.

“Meliptimous Taggle. “ Thus begins this odd tale of a man with an odd name that doesn’t really sound odd...even though it is.

“Meliptimous.” When I first heard it, I thought I had misheard him. “Excuse me, sir?” I said to him.

“Meliptimous Taggle,” he said, as slowly and patiently as if he were saying “William Vanderbilt.”

Meliptimous and Taggle both sounded strangely familiar and yet I’m sure that I had never heard either name before that night. It was simply one of those names that sound exotic and familiar at the same time. More than that, really. I mean. They both sound like words but either of them are.

Meliptimous Taggle had more truth attached to him than all the world’s rich guys combined have relatives begging for the crumbs from their tables. If you’re confused how I mean that, I’m sure that you aren’t alone.

“Meliptimous,” the beautiful redhead squeezing her luscious body against him said, “ Are you sure this is the best place to discuss this?”

Meliptimous laughed and gave me a broad wink. “ I have never been in a more comfortable establishment. We Taggle’s have a way of finding these places.”

6 THOUGHTS OF A SUICIDAL SKYDIVING INSTRUCTOR

The day I went skydiving on the North Shore of Oahu, it was the 1000th dive of the instructor I was strapped to. Before we jumped, he told me he'd been feeling a bit depressed. We were the last ones out of the plane and the first one's on the ground. Do the math.

That's crazy. I would never do that. Somewhat disturbing to think about what it would be like to do it though. It wouldn't really be hard. I mean, it wouldn't haunt me because I would be dead. Right? I mean, that's what it is.

But to not pull the cord. The strength it will take to not pull the ripcord. To not choose life at the last moment. There really can't be much more difficult than that. I have my doubts about whether I could really do it.

Fuck, I'm late. Fuck it, today will be my 1000th dive. Cool. Shit. Gotta go. I'm sick of working. Sick of having to be anywhere.

It's a cool job though. I do have that going. I've got to be there, but it's pretty cool. I just hate strapping myself to strangers and pretending to feel the thrill of their first airplane jump as if it is my first time too. Life is most difficult when you are insincere. Suddenly the world begins

to appear as full of shit as you are.

7 THE EARNEST MAN

I was a stock broker back in 2003. I thought I should write about it. The problem was I wasn't very excited about the job or the writing .

1.

“Not with my money,” my father said as he spread the dark gray mortar over bricks in the backyard. “I won't pay for an education where you have no future. There is no future in philosophy.”

I watched as he stacked bricks and his dream backyard brick barbecue came to life. “I've never met a philosopher that had any money.” His big rough hands were surprisingly gentle as the bricks were fitted into place and his goal became a reality. I doubted that he'd ever met a philosopher at all.

"It's like these bricks." He said. "Each of us is given the ability to pick them up and to put them into place. The bricks are here, but we have to have the vision to see how to put them together. Otherwise..." he kicked over the remaining bricks behind him now that the barbecue was built, " ...otherwise, we just end up with a big useless pile of bricks."

I saw my chance. The smell of the lime in the mortar made me feel like I was sick. Like the smell that they use to wake you up when you pass out. Maybe it was that which encouraged me to try to persuade him to my way of thinking. Maybe I could wake him up.

"But Dad, what you are saying is philosophy. That's what I want to learn. How to put together all these virtual bricks and create something beautiful, like your barbecue." As I said it, I knew he would think I was mocking him. I'd already lost.

His blue eyes squinted at me and then a foreboding smile came upon his face. "Exactly," he said. "That's why you won't get a cent of money from me unless you major in business, Cliff. Not a god damn penny. You may be independent of my house, but you are still dependent on my money. If you want to learn philosophy like this, you better learn a trade."

He started to pick up the fallen bricks and then thought better of it. "Stack these bricks into something usable, Cliff. If you can't come up with anything useful, just put them in a neat pile in the garage." He laughed. He'd won.

And that's how I ended up getting an MBA and working at Florey and Company Securities. My father was right. I needed money. I needed a trade. Somehow though, I

never forgot about the need to understand why we do the things we do. Philosophy.

2.

Florey and Company was the largest securities firm on the West Coast. They had recruited me at a campus job fair at Portland State University about two weeks before I graduated with my MBA. My first day of work was a month later and it took me two more months to get my Series 7 and Series 63 securities licenses. And there I was. Right where my father had wanted me. I was a stockbroker.

Florey sat in Portland's compact city center right between the Willamette River and Chinatown. We occupied the entire 23rd floor of the Portland Landmark Building. I would catch the bus from my apartment in South East and then walk three blocks along the waterfront until I got to the Landmark. I did that for a year and a half. Almost the same routine every day. The doorman would greet me, I'd say hello to the security guards, grab a bagel and a cup of coffee from the cart in the lobby, take the elevator to the 23rd floor, and get to work. Day in and day out. Nothing exciting except the rise and fall of the Dow Jones Industrial Average. Selling stock was my purpose in life.

My home life was slightly more exciting, I mean, there was my girlfriend Allison. We'd met at the Laughing Planet Café on Belmont street. It was hippie place. She was a hippie. Of course, you must be asking, what was young Mr. Stockbroker doing there...Simple. I was reading Camus and having vegan biscuits and gravy. She was a philosophy major or at least she would have been except that she met this guy and followed him to Mexico where

they became shepherds and lived in a hacienda where they smoked dope and ate peyote buttons. For that, she gave up her education, defaulted on her loans, and somehow became so disillusioned that now was slinging vegan hash at the Laughing Planet Café.

On the day my life changed again, Allison was reading the Dhammapadda as I got ready for work. It was a collection of stories and fables attributed to the Buddha himself. Supposedly, these were stories and poems he had told to his followers. It was like the Muslim Hadith for Buddhists. I figured it was just control mechanisms put in place after he died. Yeah, I'd become a bit cynical.

"Hey Cliff," she said kissing me before I left our place. "Think about this for a second," she pointed to a page of the Dhammapada. She was always throwing obscure philosophical ideas at me, sometimes I liked it, sometimes it annoyed me.

"Allison, I don't have time," I told her as I looked at my watch in exaggerated haste. There was slim chance I would miss the bus if I didn't leave now.

She laughed at me. "That's the problem with the modern man," she teased. "The modern man always has the time," She pointed at my watch. "But he never has the time for anything important." She pointed at the Dhammapada.

Somehow, she always managed to wake me up from the sleep my life had become. I could catch the next bus. I didn't always have to be 15 minutes early, but the idea of being late always bothered me. I guess I picked that up in college.

"Okay, what do you got." I put my arm around her as she

snuggled close to me, kissing my neck.

"Read it," she said pointing her long, silver ring covered finger at the text.

"Earnest among the thoughtless, awake among the sleepers, the wise man advances like a racer, leaving behind the hack."

"Ah yes," I said. "The Importance of Being Earnest. Did you know that when Oscar Wilde wrote it, they often used the word Earnest to mean gay? It was like a code." I kissed her forehead.

"That's not why it's important," she said to my back as I rushed out the door. I could still catch the bus.

The words would stick with me through my day. It was something we had done since we met. I was going to think about it on the bus, between clients, and on my walk from the bus stop to Foley and Co. And then later we'd talk about it. After I'd had time to think about it.

October rain was coming down as I stepped onto the bus. Once the rain starts in Portland, it feels like it will never stop. Not until the end of the world. I tried to fit the Dhammapadda's words into my life. Thoughtless certainly described the people on the broker floor. There was never a less thoughtful crowd on the planet. It didn't matter if they were convincing a widow to invest her savings in a stock that might head south, making the sale was all that mattered. No room for thoughtfulness. The earnest man, who was he? All Oscar Wilde references aside, earnest implied someone who was honestly striving for something they believed worthwhile. Was I the earnest man? Not a chance. I was anything but earnest. I was just another

thoughtless sleeper on the broker floor. Leave the house at 5am and leave work at 5 pm. With 12 hour days and never quite enough to pay off my student loans. Yeah, it turned out my father didn't want to help me with my education at all. I was lucky that I could get loans when he told me he didn't have a pot to piss in from his cellphone a cruise ship in Hawaii. I was surprised he didn't laugh as he said it.

I found a seat near the front and squeezed in next to the window. A large black woman who looked as though she might be mildly retarded sat next to me. I squeezed further. The windows were opaque with the warmth of our collective breath. I looked around me for the earnest man. Or woman. Nothing. Just cold people dragging themselves from sleep to continue their daily toil. No one looked like they believed in what they were doing. Not even the bus driver. A stern old man in his sixties who gave away his origins with his rote announcements delivered in a passionless Southern twang. "Ya'll get to the back so we can get more people on." It sounded like a recording. No emotion. No expectation that anyone would actually get any closer to the other specters of the early hours than they had to. The standers shuffled like zombies, but no one actually changed position. Certainly, I was surrounded by the thoughtless here too, but of a different sort.

When I got off the bus, the rain had turned to a fine mist. An umbrella would no longer do me any good, so I left it collapsed. What exactly did it mean to be earnest? Was it to believe in what you were doing? Did it mean that you had an important purpose and to kept to it? My brain worked through the words. This tidbit of philosophy was like a puzzle to amuse me through the thoughtless day. It made my life bearable.

I walked down the park's concrete paths and gazed out at

the Willamette. One thing about the rain, it kept the grass green. The emerald of the shore contrasted with the brown water's swirling current and the even gray of the air. The murky waters looked like they went nowhere. A water dog chasing its tail in a perpetual game of tag that could never be won. Under the Burnside Bridge, there was, as usual a handful of homeless men and women bundled up in blankets and old sleeping bags. Some of them could be dead, but no one would know except the members of the tribe. People were sometimes robbed here. These people were below the law. Victims of it, bound with it but at the same time free from its constraints. What was punishment for others was an improvement of their material situation. A free bed and three meals a day. Indoor toilets. Heat, running water, safety. In such a situation, the laws of society only applied to them when it was convenient.

A shape to the side of me rose up like a ghost and shed to multicolored rags which covered it to the ground. Torn bits of blankets and sheets falling towards the ground as it rushed towards me. No time for me to think as I lifted my briefcase and prepared to hit the monster, but at the last minute it stopped, turned a dirty gray beard covered face towards me and gave a gap toothed grin as twin blue supernovas stared into my consciousness.

"You dare to wake the sleeping?" he roared. "How thoughtless!" I'd expected his words to be something more along the lines of "Spare change?" or maybe "Die!" but either way, I began walking again and kept a firm grip on my briefcase. I said nothing.

The bum screeched with laughter now. "Look at him!" he said, stopping and pointing at me. "Racing ahead as if he were actually heading towards something." The others under the bridge mumbled and laughed in reply or just

ignored him as I tried to do.

I emerged from under the other side of the bridge. He didn't follow me out into the misty light, but his words sent shockwaves through my mind. In a mocking child's tone he sing songed after me "Look how earnest he is! Look at the earnest man go. Ha ha ha. Earnest my ass. Coward!"

I walked faster, but just so I wouldn't be late.

3.

The world of a telephone stockbroker is one of controlled chaos. Because my closing rate was around 30%, I was assigned three human dialers. 30% may sound low, but do the math. If I talked to ten qualified leads every four hours and managed to close three of them on an initial investment with Foley and Co. of \$5000, then that meant that my commission was \$450. It meant Foley and Co. made around \$800. So three dialers was a mark of prestige.

The dialers were broker trainees who were still studying to pass their series 7's and 63's. Using two telephones they would call business owners and current investors from our lead sheets in all fifty states. They were expected to make 20 calls an hour. Out of those twenty calls, perhaps one of the leads would be qualified. Qualified leads had to own stock already, be the person in charge of buying, and most importantly, stay on the phone long enough to hear my

initial pitch.

This week I was pitching JP Morgan. Dialer three sent me a qualified lead "Here's Cliff McCreary." It was the signal that the unknowing lead was about to be handed off for the hard sell. My computer screen flashed with his information as my phone rang. His name was David Blackwell.

"Mr. Blackwell," I said in a cheery and confident tone, "Cliff McCreary here. I hear you own a little bit of Eli Lily. How's that treating you?" The number one rule to keep the lead on the phone was to keep him off balance. Ask a lot of questions, surprise him with your knowledge of his personal business, and most importantly, don't give him a chance to leave the path you lay out for him. Let him think he was in charge while leading him the entire way.

"Yeah, it goes through its good times and its bad, wait, who is this? Cliff who?" he was starting to realize what had happened. I had to get him interested quickly or he would hang up.

"McCreary. Foley and Co. Largest independent west coast brokerage in America. How'd you like that move last week with the stock reversal? Did you catch that? What did you think of that David?" It was important to get on a first name basis while the lead was still trying to figure out who I was and how I knew he owned Eli Lily.

"Great stuff," David replied. "I'm a share holder so I vote on these decisions. I voted against it of course...." He tailed off a bit thinking of the money he'd lost when his shares had consolidated three to one in a reverse stock split. Of course he owned Eli Lily. He was the owner of a farm equipment supply company in Indiana. Everyone in Indiana owns Eli Lily. Especially the farmers. It had been

my calculated risk to make the assumption, but in fact it was just knowledge I didn't know yet, but I knew. That was why I had the dialers working Indiana today. The stock had gone through the reverse split on an earnings report, the price had dropped, and everyone that held it long term knew that it would come back up. Well, actually, they didn't know at all. They hoped. It had always done it before. Inside every investor there is a fear that they will get caught in the next Enron or Worldcom. That was what I was shooting for.

"Tell me David, " I said in my calmest, most charming voice, "Is that how you always pick your stocks? Do you always pick whatever is closest to home and then hold it tight until it either sinks or swims? How much did you lose?"

"That's none of your business...eh...Cliff. I lost enough. Where are you calling from again?" He was actually pretty good. I bet this guy was a great businessman. He didn't lose his focus for very long. But, he was letting me get away with it. That was good. I knew I had him. The rest of the conversation had already been mapped out. He just didn't know it. He would tell me that he had a broker. Someone he's known for years, someone that lived in his home town. I would ask him why his broker didn't warn him to sell before the reverse split. He would say that it would come back up, he believed in buying and holding. Of course he did. That was what his lazy broker had trained him to do, I would tell him. He would defend Eli Lily and I would agree with him and then I would let him have it.

"But David, wouldn't it have been nice to work with a broker that was actually tracking the earnings reports, institutional investors, and the Fibonacci curves? Wouldn't it have been nice to sell your stock high yesterday and

then to buy it low this morning? Increase the number of shares you own without spending a dime, right? I mean, David, you are in this to make money, right? Not to make friends?"

He was a smart guy so of course he followed my reasoning. He wasn't in this to give his old friend's nephew a commission. He was investing to make money. He was a nice Midwestern guy so he had stayed on the phone while I insulted his business acumen and tried to let me down easy. They all did it the same way.

"Look Cliff, you're right, but it's a little late to kick myself now. I mean the stock has already started going back up." He was right and never mind that I hadn't told a single client to sell Eli Lilly or to buy it when the shares dropped. That wasn't my business.

"Exactly," I said. It's a great word to make people feel like they are still in control of the conversation, "but you have to admit JP Morgan seems to be headed in the right direction today...have you looked at the earnings for it lately?" He was hooked. It took another thirty minutes to get past all of his objections but I did it calmly. He had to raise the objections to convince himself that I was real. I knew his objections before he did. I literally have a list of objections that sits right in front of me. I also have the counter arguments. The bottom line was I made him think that his current broker didn't have a clue how the market worked... and that I did.

And then, as I had known he would, he decided to 'take a chance' on me and bought into JP Morgan for just under seven grand. I passed him back to the cage so that they could take his e-check and filled out my order ticket. Five minutes later he was an official client of Foley and Co.

He'd be telling his buddies about his hotshot west coast broker over beers that evening. My only concern at the moment was to ring the brass bell that hung near the cage and let all the other brokers know that Cliff McCreary had closed another sale. I was a rising star.

When you're dealing with the whole country the only time standard you can really go by is when the markets in New York open, and when they close. Closing time meant lunch. I avoided the dialers who all wanted to congratulate me on ringing the bell, I avoided the brokers who all wanted to talk about either sales strategy or strippers, and instead I went across the street to the sandwich shop. I ordered a tuna on rye and took it into the walled Chinese Garden. Portland is a white bread city filled with surprising cultural attractions. Once inside, I took my tuna fish to where the giant goldfish swam placidly in heated ponds.

I was still on a bit of a sales high. The rush of landing a client is like the rush of a battle or the rush of killing big game. I was a hunter, victorious in the pursuit of my prey.

That looks delicious, " a familiar voice said. "Can I have half?"

Red rimmed supernova blue eyes stared at me from a gray whiskered face and the smell of booze-sweat wafted toward me as he sat down next to me. Mid forties to late fifties, and a life completely and utterly wasted.

"I'm serious," he said. "I'm hungry." I held half the sandwich out to him, wondering how he had paid the entrance fee to come in the garden. He took the sandwich and bit into it. He didn't seem dangerous at all out from under the bridge.

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"Your questions won't work on me. I'm in charge here." He said around another bite. "Why do you want to know my name?"

"I just gave you half my sandwich!"

"Yes. Thank you. Why do you want to know my name?"

"I don't want to know your name." I felt myself becoming defensive.

"Then why did you ask?" He was chewing his food.

"I...I...uhm, I was just being polite." I said.

"Oh, okay. Hey are you going to eat the other half of this sandwich?" He was almost through with his and I hadn't taken a bite of my half yet. Since I was feeling defensive, I took a bite. Why in the world was I feeling defensive?

"Oh, good," he said. "I thought maybe you were one of those 'Let's feed the bums' people. Bad stuff. Don't feed the bums." He was finishing the last bites and then licking his filthy fingers. After that he held out his hand to me.

"I'm Pete. What's your name?" I was still eating and I didn't really want to touch his hand. Even when I was done, I didn't want to touch his hand, especially after he'd licked his fingers.

"Pete, maybe you should wash your hands." It just came out of my mouth as I gestured towards the koi pond.

Pete shook his head sadly. "I've got no time for hacks," he said and then he was gone, off like a racer and leaving me to my life among the sleepers.

8 HARRY CHRISTMAS

“It’s Christmas”, Harry thought to himself. “Why not?”

With that he grabbed the red leather purse from the bleach blond lady walking into the toy store while shoving her against the merrily painted glass of the door. She was cut off mid sentence while her companion looked on in shock at what was happening.

“...and I had to wait in line for another hour in order to get the discount that they advertised in the newspaper. I’ve never been so....”

That was the part that Harry heard her saying and then he was off like Carl Lewis. Nothing was easier than ripping off assholes at Christmas. Normally he would be able to tell himself that they needed the money more than he did, or some such garbage just to convince himself that he needed to keep his piece of shit janitor job at City Hall, but there was really something about Christmas that always made him feel....festive was probably the right word....and the result was him running down the sidewalk feeling like life was actually worth living. Just running for all he was worth and thinking about the best way to evade any possible pursuit while Christmas carols chimed through his

head.

The next morning Harry arrived at work just ten minutes early. Late for him. He was usually there at least 30 minutes before he was supposed to be. He would make coffee and wander through the half lit cubicles seeing if anyone had hung any new pictures of their kids or what kind of assignments the mayor had given to the other grunts in the Honolulu City Hall, known locally as Honolulu Hale. Each day was a chance to see just how inefficient a government bureaucracy could be. On a few rare mornings, he had even found the Mayors office open. Just like this morning. Yup, there was the Mayor sleeping on the sofa next to his desk...with someone who was definitely not Mrs. Mayor.

Harry figured it must have been a great Christmas party the night before. He made sure that he woke the mayor and his friend up. Yup, it was going to be a great Christmas. He was sure now that he'd get a nice bonus and maybe even a promotion. Christmas rocks!

Joseph Thinks to Himself 2000 years later

(A Random note not connected to the story above. I'd like to write Joseph's biography one day)

Sure, you know the story of my son. Everyone does, I'm not even going to go into that shit. People think it's just the Christians, but it's not. Everyone knows my boy. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus. He's the most important man in the world.

Me? I'm just his old man. All people know about me is that I didn't have any money on the day my boy was born. They know his mom, hell, people all over the world know her too. They call her "The Virgin" - now here's the question that may have never occurred to you. How do you think I feel about all of this?

Seriously. It's cool. I'm happy for the success of my family, but I can't help sometimes feeling like I should get a little more credit. I don't even get the father credit. Is that fair? Seriously. Sucks to be me.

9 RANDOM ELEMENT STORIES

For each of the following stories I had ten random people provide elements such as a prop, a character trait, character name, genre, protagonist, etc. They were all published originally on Google+

Chicken Liver Vanilla

The light gravity of the moon had strange effects on the first families to settle there. First, they unexpectedly began to live much longer than the Terran bound humans below them. That was why at the age of 44, Deborah Cartimore was treated like a teenager by those around her. After all, if everyone lives to be 180 years old, having just 44 years makes one a real spring chicken.

Actually, she would have loved to see what a real spring chicken looked like but since birds hadn't fared as well as humans on the Lunar soil, her only chance to see any kind of chicken was by logging on to the ominous monocle, and frankly she had never been all that keen on the virtual interweb googleverse. Sure, it was pretty cool to be able to take flip a lens over one eye and tune into the collective consciousness of the entire species, but she'd always preferred to be an individual. The ominous monocle tended to make everyone pistachio when she preferred to enjoy the taste of many flavors.

That conservative black philanthropist, for example – the one who'd told her that the Loonies didn't deserve to eat unless they paid the Terrans with indentured servitude – he'd been one scoop of vanilla topped with a piece of rotting chicken liver...not appetizing, but at least not uni-flavor. But thinking of him got her thinking of chicken again.

At five foot nine and 210pounds, Deborah spent more than a little bit of time thinking about food in general. Chicken Liver Vanilla had brought a Soyuz full of meat and rice to give to Loonie orphans in an attempt to show that his 76 mega-trillion cubit fortune was well deserved – even if it had been built on child labor and Loonie exploitation.

Deborah longed to see a peaceful world, but even the Lunar States were torn apart by divisions between malted crunch social activists and the orange sherbert militancy of the anti-jihadist proto zionists. Her grandmother, a refugee from the Congolese Genocide of 2032 was a down to earth cookie dough peacenik, but her grandfather had been a French liberal that oozed of fraise glace – his strawberry ideals combined with the cookie dough hope had made her mother the ideal woman to fall in love with her father – a banana pineapple Ho Chi Minh worshipper from the refederated states of divided Vietnam. And all of that, plus the light lunar gravity made her a big girl that loved food and loved even more the many flavors that make the worlds into one giant waffle cone.

The big problem with peace was the same one that had been plaguing it since 2000. George W. Bush refused to die and along with vice presidents Rush Limbaugh, Rick Perry and Sarah Palin kept pushing social justice two steps back for each step humanity took forward. The three of them in one cone would probably be scabby pus, menstrual blood, and diarrhea though the Terrans in the

U.S.E. seemed to think it was all tooti fruiti. And that brought her back to the Terran and his philanthropy.

She'd heard that chicken liver vanilla had actually brought a fresh flock of live chickens. That's why she was sneaking into his Soyuz...she wanted to see what they really looked like, what they smelled like, and maybe even touch one. As she crept up the gangway she could feel the familiar pulsing of her facial acne...another side effect of the low gravity. Pimples on the moon were huge...and they pulsed with blood.

She heard a strange sound and looked down to see a real life chicken at the same time reaching up to squeeze a zit. The shock of seeing the chicken jarred her and she accidentally knocked the ominous monocle down into place automatically logging into the googleverse hangout....

As if in a dream she saw the chicken as she grabbed it while at the same time the collective consciousness became aware of the same strange occurrence, a Loonie grabbing a chicken in full view of the evermind. In that moment, the shock of the situation caused all thoughts to turn from where they had been...George W. Bush announcing the annexation of Ukraine and New Zealand into the United States of Earth...for just a moment, DeborahCartimore and George W. Bush fused into a universal moment. The two countries became two chickens and her hand became the hand of coercive force...

It was the moment the subjugated minds of the world needed. A collective decision to shut down roared through the cosmos as the virtual interweb googleverse shut itself down forever...Deborah looked down at the bird in her hand knowing it was worth far more than the two she had

seen in the hands of George W. Bush.

Moral: A Bird in the Hand is worth two in the Bush

Foot Licking Good

"Rat-a-tat -tat would love to know what you are looking at?" In fact it was hard not to look but the truth is I wasn't looking at the large stuffed rattlesnake with diamond eyes. Instead I was looking at something that was far more bizarre and far less appealing though when combined with the stuffed rattlesnake, it became pretty much impossible not to look at.

Those were the first words Charlie ever spoke to me and while I claim some responsibility for what was to happen, I had no idea at that time of the role she, he, it? was going to play not only in my life but in the life of my girlfriend. As I looked at the heavy wrinkles spread across her him it's giant face, I realized I couldn't really tell the first thing about her him it beyond the fact that she him it was big big big, old, and probably not from around here. I'd love to tell more, but somehow it seems wrong for me to do it...I'd rather let her words speak for her – a good place to start is probably at the moment we met....

Charlies Diary August 30th, 2253

Today I met two young people that both had an impact on me. Should I begin with the good or the bad? Okay, the bad. I had to go to Starbucks to file my residency permit in the South Dallas coffee region. I remember reading about

how in the old days you had to take care of government bureaucracy in an office and my God am I glad I missed those days. It's so much more civilized to wait in line, get your coffee and your number, and then wait your turn listening to light death metal and funk rock.

Anyway, I knew that I would probably meet SOMEONE at the registration cafe so I made sure to tuck my snake securely and enhance my massive bosoms with the quad-D pads. So, well tucked and breast enhanced, I grabbed my favorite mu-mu (the purple one with twinkles and bears on it in greco-roman stylings) and as I was walking out my door the evil glimmer of Kaa's diamond eyes reminded me that it never hurts to have a distraction – and so I brought that old rattlesnake too.

Everything was fine until I reached the Barristacrat behind the counter and gave her my order “Extra Tall triple vanilla double chocolate mochiatto frappachino espresso with a twist of cinnamon and heavy cream plus a shot of tequila and a new resident form for South Dallas district.”

The Barristacrat, who's name tag said “Olive” was a tiny wisp of a girl with black hair pulled up tight in an awkward bun. My order had been clear enough but like all low level coffee functionaries, she was trying to assert her dominance. “Sex, please.”

Now, to be fair – I'd heard that some of the Southern communities still requested sex regardless of gender but this was my first time coming up against it.

“Gender neutral,” I told her. She just looked at me and repeated “Sex, please.”

I decided to be nice and pulled my 310 pounds up into the

intimidating seven feet one inches of my body. “Honey, I don't have one. I'm gender neutral – can't you see that?” I was hoping she would be intimidated by the way my massive girth towered over her, but my hopes were dashed.

“I need your sex, Ma'am-Sir”- Good lord – they didn't even call you Citizen in these backward waters. This little bitch Olive was forcing me to tell all- something I hate! I looked down at her and realized I had no choice though.

“Honey, I'm Hermaphrodite – no single sex. Okay?”If I thought that would solve it, I was wrong.

“I'm going to need you to show me,” she said. “Here is the key to the restroom, I'll meet you there in 58 seconds.”

I had no choice though. I took the key and turned to head to the restroom when I saw the most incredible pair of feet propped up on an overstuffed muted green ottoman. He'd left his sandals on the floor and I could see each detail of them. The three hairs on the second toe, the callous around the heel, the long carpals surpassing the delicate thumb-like big toe – divine. I could feel my salivary glands moving into hyperdrive and I noisily slurped my tongue along my lips to get his attention.

When he looked up I motioned to my snake- the one on my shoulder not the one in my pants – and said to him “Rat-a-tat -tat would love to know what you are looking at?”

It's all I can write at the moment – I'm still too upset about what happened next.

Charlies Diary August 30th, 2253

Alright- I'm better now. Last night I brought in six prostitutes – two men and four women and gave myself a foot licking extravaganza. I always feel better after that. As someone who has all the equipment but can't see their own feet- it's no wonder I have this fascination. And if a few of them had fun with my snakes and tunnels – well...there's no reason everyone shouldn't have a nice time. Is there?

And that brings me back to yesterday. There I was, looking at those gorgeous feet and on the verge of really getting somewhere with the guy connected to them when the evil Olive struck again -

“Uh, Mr.-Miss! We have an appointment, remember?” She stood looking out of the door with those beady coal button eyes and that scrawny white chicken neck. I knew what she wanted and I was going to give it to her. I marched my massive Mongolian-Ukranian frame to the door and squeezed myself through...yes, there she was next to the toilet just as I'd expected.

“Alright Miss-Mr, we'll need you to give us a sample of your pee so we can confirm that you carry all the requisite hormones and chromosomes of a true hermaphrodite...did you know that only .03% of those who self identify as hermaphrodite in the South Dallas Starbucks end up being exactly 50% male and female. All of the rest end up being more male or more female -in fact...” Miss Smarty-Party was going to go on and on but I gave her no chance when I whipped out my big ten inch- record book to show her that I was actually and factually 50/50.

Now, she just loved my big 10- inch record book because it had all the individual records but it wasn't enough for her.

"Since we're in here, can you just show me...?" And so I did. The snake, the caves, the works and do you know what she said ?? Can you believe it? That little red bloused wench had the nerve to pinch her nostrils and say to me "I never expected them to smell so bad – you know, I have a very keen sense of smell – in fact- I think your extra tall triple vanilla double chocolate mochiatto frappachino espresso with a twist of cinnamon and heavy cream plus a shot of tequila is ready, but I'll have to ask for you to come back tomorrow for the new resident form – we're all out right now."

And would you believe that the man with the gorgeous feet was gone by the time I came out of the bathroom? How's that for bad luck? I'm going to go back now and see if he is there....

Charlies Diary September 1st, 2253

He wasn't there. And to top it off, she told me they still didn't have the new resident forms. I'm going back now and if Miss Olive doesn't have them I'm going to rip her head off her skinny little neck.

Narrator: And that's how it happened. She came in there hell bent for leather and she made the mistake of attacking my sweet Olive when my little barristacrat told her the paperwork would be delayed for two weeks. The thing about Olive is that between her ex and me, she's learned to defend herself pretty well. Bluto taught her judo and boxing and I've taught her the arts of Tae Kwon Do and spinach sucking. When that big hermaphrodite took a swing at her, Olive sucked in a mouthful of spinach, threw a right jab, and sent 310 pounds of Ukrainian Mongol across the sugar and cream counter and into the income tax form rack. Before I could grab my pipe or sandals, she

had ripped open Charlie's pants and grabbed that big ten inch – record book before she threw Charlie out of the Starbucks regional office for good. We never saw her again, but when I was looking with wonder at that big ten inch-record book, I noticed the diary entries and that's how I came to know that part I played in all of this – as I read on, I have come to realize just how fascinating Charlie's seventy-one years have been – but that's a story for later.

L33T

“What have I done to deserve this?”

With outrage coursing through his veins he screamed at the sky, demanding answers that he knew he would never receive. A lifetime's worth of frustration leading to this demand from his creator. 187 blarths of matter packed into one body that stood only five flennings and that on tip toes... still the rage had to go somewhere and he knew not where to direct it than upwards from the steel-soil of Trinpolo V, the city-state of his birth and home to the Barwhari Clan.

“Give me answers – I beg of you!” his words fell into the sky before dropping into the ocean surrounding the artificial ground of his not so recent birthing. Having lived just 240 seasons of the third moon, he was set to begin his

adult-quest at which point he would be given the chance to enter the breeding chamber to prove his genetic suitability. Lifting his well muscled arm he shook it at the sky. "Why have you done this to me?"

He was momentarily shocked to hear a reply.

"wh47 12 17 7H47 J00 R 50 uP5e7 480U7 70574d4808?" he spun quickly and lost all of his surprise when he saw his personal droid, L33t – flashing a holographic display of its words into the vacant air in front of it.

"What a piece of junk," he mumbled looking at L33t's rusty servos and salt damaged titanium shell. "What am I upset about? Isn't it obvious?"

"aC7uAlly Ma573R 7O57Ada8O8, 17'2 nO7. WoULD U cAr3 7O ofF3R MOR3 1nFoRmA71oN?" The red letters made a slight sizzling sound as they appeared in the air. One thing you learned when you dealt with a b-class retro protocol droid was that they didn't have any sense of the universal. Everything had to be explained.

"Not that you would understand L33t, but I'm fairly pissed off at this name. Here we are living on a platform created in the middle of the ocean. I live under three moons, am about to engage on the purpose of my life, in a city made from artificial platforms in the center of the Great Ocean of Calibratambia. I'm a member of the Barwhari Clan of Trinpolo and my best friend is a robot and that bastard author has the nerve to name me Tostada Bob! Give me a break – this is Year of Prantash Karuba 58875 on a distant planet in a galaxy far far away and he gives me a three letter name attached to a Mexican food moniker? It's just not right! I've been dealing with this for 240 seasons of the third moon and there he sits typing away at his computer –

the best he can do is to call me Tostada Bob?"

Turning back to the sky he shook his fist. "I demand answers you grape eating monkey-fish! What are you some kind of homeless wookiee-geek? How dare you do this to me!"

At this point, the author was more than a little disturbed and decided to consider Tostada Bob's success. A booming voice came from the sea "From this day forward your name will be Baraboma." And with that the wookiee author threw a bone to his angry protagonist.

It was however, not well met.

"What the hell is that? I ask you for a great name and you simply put the two names of a President together? Frankly, I think Tostada Bob was better." He continued shaking his fist as all angry protagonists sometimes do.

The author was none too pleased "You call me a wookiee and expect me to do you favors? - from this point forward your name is Namby Pamby." The newly named Namby-Pamby was certainly not going to take this lying down. Namby-Pamby decided to abandon his quest for an energy source to save his homeland which was now far past it's maximum capacity of 5000 souls – he would kill himself by plummeting to his death in the dangerous waters and being eaten by the elemental forces that filled it. He would become one with the light-rogs and end this horrible story before it could begin.

The only problem was that the author was one step ahead of him and put him in a motorized wheelchair that was pre-programmed to protect it's occupant at all costs. He could no longer kill himself.

"What am I to do?" he shouted. For a moment there was no answer but as usually happened, his hyperactive best friend L33t decided to take matters into his own servos and offered a solution.

"“1 5U99357 4 n3W 57R4739y, N4M8Y-p4m8Y. L37 73h W00k133 w1N.” It was his only hope. L33t saw what he had missed – there is no way to win against he who writes your destiny.

"Okay, okay – give me my old name back. Please." The man who had recently been Namby-Pamby was now freed from the dreadful name and out of gratitude for this unexpectedly compliant behavior the author now called him Tostatabob.

"Hmmm...that's not bad," Tostadabob said to his droid. "It's amazing what a difference a little space can make."

L33t wasn't surprised but felt it was now his duty to bring Tostadabob back to the task at hand. He needed to discover a way to create enough power to operate the food replicators and air scrubbers for the ballooning population of Trinpolo V.

It turned out that the solution was under his feet all along and since the author had somehow neglected to collect an impediment to Tostabob's desire, all of the pieces quickly fell into place. Stepping out of the wheelchair he was no longer confined to he walked backwards into the nearby electrical supply hut to get a screwdriver and a length of gestilabrac cable.

"Why d0 j00 4IW4y2 90 84ckw4Rd2 7Hr0U9H d00R2?" L33t demanded in hot pink letters as he manicly circled around the safety edges of the platform and repeatedly

poked his arms and eyepods out and then in and then out and then in and then out and then in...

"It's bad luck to go through doors front ways – it's the fastest way to let an Iliac spoor take root in your anus. They always get you from behind and they have to take root inside. Besides, it's bad luck," L33t kept darting in and out while Tostadabob wrapped the gestilabrac cable around the wheelchair and then ran it to the inverted triple condense power supply. "That should just about do it..."

L33t's curiosity was only exceeded by his hyperactivity.

"Come look L33t," Tostadabob motioned to the droid. As the droid came closer to inspect his handywork he jammed the screwdriver into the leg servos.

"h3Lp. MURD3R. H3lp. H3'2 90In' 70 Phr49 M3H. n4m8Y-p4M8Y H42 90N3 in54n3." There was no one nearby to hear the droids screams and the author ignored them since he was curious how Tostadabob planned to power the entire independent nation of Trinpolo V (which, just to be clear was made up of massive platforms anchored to the seabottom but also able to float free in the event of a catastrophic event...just in case you were curious.)

Once the droid was strapped in place, Tostadabob gave the wheelchair a shove and it plunged over the side falling to within inches of the light-rogs waiting below. As they snapped upwards at the now helpless L33t, their energy was captured by the gestilabrac cable and routed into the power grid. While it was amazing that no one had thought to harness the power of the light-rogs like this before, the solution was viable and Tostadabob knew in an instant that on the following day he would have his choice of the maidens in the breeding chamber.

He knew he should feel sad about using his best friend in this way, but the truth was – L33t speak had begun to annoy him at least 200 3rd moons ago. He smiled to himself. It looked like Year of Prantash Karuba 58875 was going to be okay after all. As he turned backwards to re-enter his clan dome as a hero – he knew that somewhere in the year 2011, the author too was glad to be rid of L33t.

Septimous Foreskin

“Septimous!” the shrill voice rang out coldly on the Amsterdam streets. There was no chance that he was going to go back. “Where are you Septimous? SEPTIMOUS!” He was done with that life. He liked it just fine where he was now.

She had always found him before but this time he wasn't going to let it happen. All he wanted to do was play with Megaman and every time the action started getting good, there she was ruining it. He and Megaman had a special relationship. Megaman told him stories of cyborgs and the evil Dr. Wily and how his arm cannon used to be good for more than scratching Septimous back. To be fair, Septimous felt bad for using Megaman this way, but he just couldn't reach the itchy spots on his own. In the stories, Megaman always would break off and say things like “We should go Septimous. Imagine it...just you and me against all the evils of the world. Megaman and Septimous. We could be famous.”

The problem was that every time he'd tried to put their plan into action by bolting out the door, his mother got in the

way. Dr. Melinida Foreskin was nothing if not fast. Megaman often expressed his gratitude that he had only had to fight Dr. Wily and the cyborgs instead of Dr. Foreskin. No matter where they hid, she could find them. It helped that she knew every other mother in suburban Akron, Ohio. After all, she was the top pediatrician in the city.

This time would be different though. Why? Well, for one thing, Megaman had a plan. For another thing, they weren't in Akron anymore. Instead they were in Amsterdam. Dr. Foreskin had brought Septimous and his older sister, Brit, with her and after the conference they were going to spend a few weeks touring Europe. At least that was her plan. Megaman's plan was something else all together. Of course, it almost fell apart before it began.

As the family was leaving the house, his mother had grabbed Megaman from his hands. "Septimous, you are not bringing this dirty old thing with you to Europe." She'd thrown Megaman on the couch as if he were just a toy instead of the savior of the human race. "That thing hasn't worked in years." Megaman had told Septimous that the problem was the economy and fucking non -imaginative Republicans, but Septimous figured it was really just a matter of the batteries being dead.

"Mom...please, please. I need him..I can't, I mean it's ...I just ...Megaman Mom. Please." He was desperate and as usually happened when he was nervous, his few words dried up and he found himself involuntarily placing his hands in front of him with exaggerated slowness. First in front, then higher, then to the side – palms very flat. As if he were trapped...."

Dr. Foreskin saw his state and decided to let him win the

battle. "Okay, okay...no need to be a man in a box. Jeez, what are you practicing your busking for Europe? You planning to run away and join a mime circus?"

And so Megaman came. The flight was long but along the way, Megaman told him all the details of what would happen. At the first opportunity, they would run and this time, it wouldn't be into the nets of all the Akron moms. It would be easy. The details didn't all make sense to Septimous, after all he was just a five year old that stood less than a meter tall and weighed just 17 kg.

Once they were at the hotel, Dr Foreskin took the kids to the room asked Brit to watch her brother and then went out to make arrangements for the rest of their trip. Brit thought she was so smart. She was blond and blue eyed and had white white white skin. Their mom said they were both Spanish, Irish, and French but that Brit's dad was Scottish and Septimous' father was Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino. Megaman told him that the reason they were friends were because of this bit of Japanese. As to the fathers- Dr. Foreskin had sent them each packing for her own reasons. She liked to tell her kids that she didn't need a man around. That was fine with Septimous because soon she wouldn't have a Megaman around either.

Brit turned on the television and told him to play with his maple bacon smelling doll on the floor. Personally, Septimous liked the smell, that was why he'd used that grease when Megaman told him that he needed to be waterproofed. with the TV on Brit Foreskin fell into a trance watching Justin Beiber. It was time to make their move.

Septimous tip toed to the door, opened it and bolted down the hallway. He found the stairs and went down what seemed like a hundred flights. The elevator had been so

quick. Out the emergency door, through the lobby, and oops, there was his mom...he was out the door and behind the mailbox before she made it outside.

“SEPTIMOUS!”

She would never find them. He started miming man in a box as he hid behind the letter box. It was probably for that reason that he was caught by surprise.

“Are you looking for this little rascal, Dr. Foreskin?” a strong hand clamped down on him. The mans' big gray mustache and puffy hair spouting from the sides of his bald head would have been funny if it weren't for the evil behind his eyes. He grabbed Megaman in one hand and Septimous in the other.

Dr. Foreskin came running up. She grabbed Septimous roughly...”You scared me, what were you thinking?Come on...” She began dragging him back to the hotel...

“But Mom, wait, what about Megaman?” He gestured back to where the man in the white coat still held Megaman.

“Septimous, I've had enough. Dr. Wily, thank you for finding my son. Would yo do something with that stupid doll of his?”

Dr. Wily smiled wickedly. “It would be my complete pleasure Dr. Foreskin. I'll see you at the conference.”

Something Smells Funny

"What do you think you are doing?"

Rafael hadn't seen her come back into the office. He had been....occupied. He dropped the shoe from his face back to the floor but the feelings it had stirred in him were anything but lowered. He had to get out of here.

"Why were you smelling my shoes?" Mrs. Bartolinni was in her early sixties, but she was dangerously big and from what he could tell, she was also dangerously aroused. As she came at him with her old fists raised he suddenly saw her lying sprawled on the floor. For the most part, he hated the visions but in this case it was nice to be able to step back without too much worry.

As he moved away, the old woman's big feet were snagged on the rug and she came tumbling down. Rafael moved to the door before turning back "It turns out I won't be needing any tax advice from you after all, something smells funny here." And then he was gone. Mrs. Bartolinni's moans followed him out the door. Damn, another dead end. On his way down the steps he stopped to smell the roses...literally. For some reason that ephemeral sweet smell always acted as a reset on his olfactory nerves no matter if the most recent smell had been potent, musky, heady or sweet. In this case, he was glad for the opportunity since the old woman's shoes had smelled of medicated ointment, toe jam, and dog turds along with something else.... Definitely not what he had been expecting. Hopefully it was enough to go on.

If you've ever heard someone refer to a ninety-five pound weakling, chances are the picture in your brain would fit Rafael pretty well. At just five feet and exactly 95 pounds he was anything but intimidating. In fact, no one took him seriously, not even children. He'd tried growing mustaches,

beards, and working out but nothing changed him. Once when he'd grown a particularly thick and full beard he'd been walking through the park when he heard some child say "Hey Dad, look at that little kid with a beard!"

That wasn't the worst of his problems though. Rafael had a nose that made Pinocchio look honest and skin that looked like it had been fried in a vat of canola oil. Not only was he small, but Rafael was ugly with a capital "U". Still, that wasn't the worst of his problems either. What was the worst?

Those damn visions. Ninety percent of them came true just like the one of Bartolinni falling on her face but the other ten percent just disappeared. That may not sound like a big deal, but when you grab a child to rescue them from a speeding car and no car appears, things start to look weird and you know what the funny thing is about humans? You can be right 90% of the time but they only remember the 10% when you are wrong.

The one thing he did have going for him was the fact that he smelled good. Now, when I say he smelled good, I don't mean he had a pleasant odor. Rafael's magnificent nose was not only huge on his face, it was also huge in the ways that he could use it. He could out-smell bloodhounds and sniff people's emotions. He'd sometimes wondered if it was this odoriferous miracle that gave his brain the power of the visions, as if the brain's architecture was altered in such a way to provide the one that he automatically got the other. A cosmic buy one get one free that perhaps made up for his shortcoming in stature.

His nose had given him everything. He'd used it to find money (he could literally sniff it out), he'd used it to get laid (because when you can smell exactly the right moment,

you can have any woman), and he'd used it to make a career for himself as a dick. Dick nose. Rick Nose. Richard Probiscus, Private Detective aka Rafael. Funny how childhood taunting had led him to the perfect career.

As he walked down Old Compton Street he had another of those stupid flashes that were the bane of his existence. In this case he saw a giant tower that stood way over the buildings of London. The tower was white and had the letters BT on it in impossibly big letters – and then, like that, it was gone. He looked down and saw an abandoned newspaper on the ground. The headline was what had gotten him into that horrible business with Bartolini in the first place.

Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon and The Duke of York had announced their engagement the previous day, January 23rd, 1923. The future King and Queen had caused royal madness as the world prepared for a royal wedding like none they had ever seen before. The advent of film and radio meant that the entire empire would be able to take part. That in turn had caused everyone to start planning their own Royal Wedding parties and that had led to the call he'd gotten this morning offering to pay him five thousand pounds if he could track down a bottle of 1893 Chateau Margaux. Not it turns out, an easy thing to find. Through a chevalier friend, he'd managed to trace a bottle to the Bartolini cellars on Hastings Street but by the time he'd gotten there, all that remained was the cork he was absently fingering in his pocket.

Bartolini had told him she sold the decanted wine to a young man earlier that day. She would tell neither his name nor where she had met him. It was for this reason he'd resorted to smelling her shoes. He needed to know where she had met the buyer. Then it hit him...Hyde Park.

The smell was from the duck shit that visitors invariably stepped in.

As he quickened his pace he suddenly had another vision. His white white body lying on the ground bleeding. With five kinds of northern European blood spilling onto the gray cobblestones. A study in gray, white, and red. If he could have one thing, certainly it would be to stop seeing that particular vision.

In such a moment, it was no wonder that he didn't see the car bearing down on him, didn't smell the scent of his own blood coursing through the veins of the eighteen year old driver, didn't remember the woman he'd seduced twelve years before because it was 'her time', and didn't have any clue that the driver of the vehicle that hit him was not only drunk on the same 1893 Chateau Margaux he was looking for, but was also one of many sons he never knew he had. After all, what woman in her right mind would tell a hideous lover she was pregnant with his child? In this case, it made more sense for her to tell her chevalier husband that the big nosed child was his own.

And thus it was that the one thing Rafael desired more than any other, a stop to the false visions came to pass as his white white body lay on the ground bleeding. With five kinds of northern European blood spilling onto the gray cobblestones. A study in gray, white, and red. Even the greatest nose it turns out, can't smell it's own death coming.

10 PSYCHIC DREAMS OF CHINA

I don't know what the hell to tell you about this one except that it's mostly true. I don't remember their real names....

Kimo was the Hawaiian guy who taught Latin dance at an English pub in China. He had been a mechanical engineer in Honolulu until God started talking to him while he slept. God's message was clear, quit his job, give away his possessions, move to China, and become a dance instructor. God works in mysterious ways, right?

Even so, Kimo couldn't really take the dream seriously until he'd had it fifteen or twenty times. It seemed so ridiculous. God certainly understood that he could accomplish more in Honolulu as an engineer earning close to half a million dollars than as a dance instructor in China. So Kimo looked for other ways to show his respect and love for his God. He started to give more money to his church; he adopted several needy children through Sally Struthers, the American woman who appeared on television with bloating and malnourished children from third world countries. He expected the dream to either go away or to change, but it never did. In fact, it got more demanding as time went by. He decided to ignore it.

As time passed, he began to notice the emptiness of his life. He was a bachelor, but none of the women he knew appealed to him on a psychic level. Sure some of them were beautiful, sophisticated, and enchanting; they just lacked a certain...something. He began spending more and more time at home, seeing the decadence that abounded in his favorite cafés, bars, and discos. He grew further and further from his friends as he realized how different they were to one another. His engineer friends locked in a world of mathematics and mechanics while he found himself drifting further and further into a world of metaphysics and the occult. God worked in mysterious ways.

He started noticing how expensive the clothes of his congregation were and how little they cared about the suffering that happened right outside the doors of the parish. He realized that he could do so much more with the money he was giving to Sally Struthers, if only he were to take it to China and give it to the children who needed it himself.

In noticing his fellow's excesses, he became aware of his own. The beautiful flat filled with wonderful works of art, the fashionable clothing, and the ultra comfortable and chic furniture he lounged in. He became somewhat odd to his coworkers, appearing at work in flowered Hawaiian shirts, faded jeans, and flip flops rather than the usual Armani suits.

He quit going to church altogether, which upset the congregation enough to send a delegation to his flat to check if everything was all right. He sent them away with a large check and his assurance that he was preparing for a vacation to China.

When he informed his superiors that he was leaving the company and moving to China, they suggested he take an indefinite leave of absence and if he should want to return, there would always be a spot open for him. He accepted their proposal and his coworkers began to whisper to each other that they had seen it coming for a while, he was overworked and needed a vacation, was what they said.

The man from the Salvation Army insisted on calling his superiors to find out if they could accept such expensive donations and beautiful artwork. He had been driving the collection truck for nearly 3 years and it was the first time anyone had ever donated an honest to goodness Van Gogh or a Louis XIV chaise lounge. His superiors came in person and brought a metro news team with them. Kimo hadn't wanted that kind of attention. They awarded him certificates and honorifics in front of the cameras.

His mother saw the story and called him that evening. She and everyone else he knew. No one answered the phone in his flat. He had given his answering machine to the Salvation Army and Kimo was seated on a flight to Beijing carrying nothing but a duffel bag filled with flowered Hawaiian shirts, faded Levi's, and close to \$75,000 in Travelers Checks.

George Shu was a successful Hong Kong businessman. He owned a string of 14 companies which all had exceeded their earning forecasts by a vast margin. No one understood why he sold nearly all his stock in a single day, but it caused a panic on the Hang Seng index as shareholders dumped their shares. It was a strange day, nearly everyone who sold lost huge amounts of money over the next few weeks, and of course everyone who bought made huge profits. There was nothing wrong with George Shu's companies. Investment firms tried in vain to

locate George and figure out what had made him dump all of his investments. No one could locate him, however. George had permanently left the business world.

The one man besides George who knew the reason didn't think it right to share it with the greedy public. He was a Taoist monk in whom George had confided the strange dreams in which Lao Tzu was telling him to give up business and start a new sort of University in Southwestern China. Since he didn't watch television or listen to the radio, the monk was unaware of what a commotion George's actions had produced.

Kimo landed in Beijing and checked into a hotel room. He had been to China before and spoke the language reasonably well. He had visited the tourist attractions in the capital city, so he simply sat in his room for the first two days meditating on what he should do. After two days of no sleep, no food, and no contact with anyone an answer had still not appeared. He began to wonder if he had made some sort of mistake in giving up everything. Doubts and fears crept into his head, he needed to find an answer, he needed to know why he was here. He needed to know where in China they could possibly need a Hawaiian Salsa instructor with engineering skills. He decided to head Southwest.

11 THE BOOK OF MYSELF

Here's another story that could possibly go somewhere...if I find the time and the energy to take it up again...

Contrary to what you might have thought when you saw the title, this is not The Book of Myself. Rather, it is a story that revolves around a book which is titled "The Book of Myself". As for me, I am a far too ordinary a man to ever think of writing a book about myself, nor to have any sort of book written about me at all. While it is true, that I will narrate the events and as such relate in some small measure all that has happened around me since I heard of *The Book of Myself*, what you will find as you read on is that the book itself is the central character in this narrative. I am just one of the many characters that the book has ensnared in it's life, however, I do take some pride in the fact that for whatever reason, it is I that am in the position to relate it's tale to those who have yet to hear of it.

I've yet to untangle the reasons why I, a respectable middle class businessman of no extraordinary sense of

adventure, am tasked with relating this tale, but as you will see, there is no doubt that it is indeed my task. As such, I suppose that I must introduce myself and relate to you those details which led to me first hearing of and coming into possession of the book. I offer my humble apologies to the reader for having to spend time hearing of my utterly normal background and forthwith I pledge to exercise the utmost brevity in the descriptions of my personal characteristics and history.

My name is William Johnson, which sounds quite nice until you realize that everyone just calls me plain old Bill. Bill Johnson. I am, in a word, ordinary. I was born to ordinary middle class parents, had an ordinary childhood, I have an ordinary sister, I went to an ordinary university, where I got an ordinary degree in accounting, this in turn landed me an ordinary job at an ordinary factory. My job, as is ordinary, led to me meeting an ordinary woman. We had an ordinary wedding, an ordinary relationship, an ordinary house, ordinary friends, and ordinary middle class activities. We saved as much as we could, worked hard, planned to have a family, and had weekend barbecue parties with our ordinary friends on the weekends. We lived in an ordinary town called Springfield and took ordinary trips together to ordinary places like Orlando, Honolulu, and Europe. We did the ordinary things on those trips. We stayed in hotels, took tours, and took lots of pictures in front of monuments which we showed our friends when we got home, just as they showed us when they returned. My entire life was ordinary and to be honest, I didn't mind it a bit. In fact, I quite liked it.

At this point, something else quite ordinary took place. My wife left one day while I was at work and when I returned home, I found a note saying that she had fallen in love with

someone else and decided to leave me for him. It didn't feel ordinary, but of course it was. I had watched many variations of the same thing happen to friends and coworkers. My reaction was also ordinary. I called the lawyer, made copies of the note, and filed for divorce. We agreed to split our assets in half which left us both half as well off as we had been. We sold the house and I buried myself in my work, just as an ordinary working man does. I rented an ordinary apartment and I tried to make it comfortable. I went to bars with the guys on Friday nights and sometimes managed to bring some ordinary woman home with me, but I never called them back. I think that is quite ordinary as well. So, even in my grief, rage, acceptance cycle, I was really just doing the ordinary thing.

But at this point, I should admit, that something not so ordinary was also taking place inside me. At least I think it's not so ordinary now, with hindsight. In losing my wife, my life, and half of what I had been working for; something inside me had broken. I don't want to make this sound bigger than it is, but perhaps it was this breaking that opened my life up in such a way that *The Book of Myself* was able to find entrance.

It started simply enough. I opened my desk drawer and saw several hundred paper clips sitting in the bottom of it. Usually, I would simply find the partition they belonged in and put them in it, but for some reason, the idea hit me that I didn't need to have possession of that many paperclips. On the average, I use perhaps two in a day. So I counted out sixty, enough to last me for the month, and I put the rest of them in a box off to one side. Over the course of a week, all of my extra pens, sticky notes, and other office gear also went into the box. It was a fairly unconscious activity. At the end of the week, the box was quite full of

things I wouldn't use or didn't need at my desk. On Friday, I placed the box on the table in the break room so that those who wanted my things could take them. Thirty minutes later when I went for a cup of tea, the box and everything in it was gone.

And at this point, dear reader, I realize that I am most likely breaking the sacred agreement between narrator and reader by boring your socks off. What I should be telling you about is the murder of Jack Stevens and the manhunt which followed, but I ask you to bear with me. Certainly Jack is a much more extraordinary sort of person than I, but I feel that it is essential to explain to you how an ordinary man like myself ended up fleeing from the Moroccan police and covered with the blood of one of the most interesting people I've ever met.

I was quite startled by the rapid disappearance of my office supplies. I couldn't for the life of me figure out who would have taken them. It wasn't as if we were a destitute workplace. When you needed something you simply asked the secretary and she would give it to you. It occurred to me, as I'm sure it has occurred to you, that perhaps the secretary had taken the supplies to redistribute them, but when I mentioned to her that I had left an important receipt(it was a lie, something I ordinarily never do) in the box of supplies, she told me that she had seen neither the pen nor the supplies. Over the weekend, my thoughts continually came back to the question of who had taken the paper clips and more importantly, why.

My curious behavior continued. At home, I started to put things I didn't wear or use into boxes as well. I was quite surprised at how quickly the boxes filled. In actuality, for the most part, I wore a very limited number of clothes. As an accountant, I feel somewhat compelled to tell you the

numbers. Three pairs of shoes, seven pairs of socks, four pairs of trousers, one pair of jeans, four t-shirts, five shirts, four ties, seven pairs of underwear, and two jackets. I should also point out that I used the same belt daily. By the end of the weekend, I had two rather large boxes filled with clothing. I thought of donating them to charity but instead, since I was still thinking of the missing paperclips, I took the boxes down to the ground floor and set them on the sidewalk where I could see them from my balcony. Over the course of the day, I watched as people shifted through my things and took them away. The majority of my clothing was taken by older, respectable looking women. This was a surprise to me since I would have thought it would be men that would take men's clothes.

To make a long story short and keep my promise of brevity, I will simply tell you that over the next two months I discarded nearly all of my possessions in this way. I would leave things on the break table at work or put them on the sidewalk. In both cases, I witnessed those who found them and was surprised to see them quite excited and happy to find my ordinary things sitting atop a sign that said 'Free'. I worried about my new found hobby and thought that perhaps it was a symptom of some deeper problem than not wanting my stuff, but since it was bringing me pleasure, I continued and told no one what I was doing.

An odd thing happened then. I became extremely detached from my empty desk and my empty apartment. I started taking long walks at lunch rather than eating and in the evenings I would stroll through narrow alleyways and streets that I had never ventured upon before. It was on one of those evening strolls that I came across the small travel agency on 12th street. The handwritten sign in the window listed destinations and fares for exotic locations.

Taped next to it were sun faded pictures that had probably been there for a decade or more. The Eiffel Tower, the pyramids, a smiling Indian woman, Big Ben, and a funny man in a giant red hat offering a metal container of water while he smiled with two gold teeth.

It was his picture that I liked and after passing by it a dozen times, I decided to ask where the picture was from. Poking my head in the shop, I smelled the heavy stale stench of cigarettes and burned coffee. A fat balding man with tufts of gray hair sticking out from the sides of his thick black glasses asked if he could help me.

"I just want to know where that picture of the smiling man in the red hat is from," I told him.

He didn't seem surprised, only slightly annoyed that he had been forced to stop reading his newspaper. "Morocco," he said. "Want a ticket?"

"No. I just like the picture."

"Fine," he barked. "Like it from outside then." And with that he went back to his paper. I hurriedly left the shop and looked back at the picture. I really did like it. It was the first time in months that I had actually liked anything.

The next week, I booked a ticket to Marrakesh. I scheduled my annual two weeks holiday and tried to get as much of my work done before I left so that some temp wouldn't screw it up while I was gone. At home, I moved most of the rest of my possessions to the street, keeping only the essentials for a month of living. I started considering what I would take with me on the trip. It was a bit of a shock to realize, I didn't want to take anything.

A month later, I put the rest of my things on the sidewalk and wearing an ordinary gray suit and carrying a simple black briefcase with three changes of underwear, three pairs of socks, two extra t-shirts, and one extra white button-down shirt, I caught a taxi to the Springfield airport so that I could catch my flight to North Africa.

It was the first extraordinary thing I had ever done.

12 AGENT WALKER

This is a semi-fictional story of my grandparents and how they met. We all thought we knew who he was. I mean he was Grand-Daddy. He came and went. He brought great presents. He liked to go to Vegas and gamble. He made sure everyone in the family had what they needed. Mostly he did that through Ganny, his wife. Her real name was Marjorie, but everyone called her Margie, or Marge. She was the dragon lady of the family, but of course, she had secrets of her own. They did a great job of convincing all of us that we were just another normal sort of family. We

weren't though. None of us were normal. Even today, none of us are normal. We learn that more every day, but maybe I should start at the beginning of what I know.

In 1916, two children were born to two high ranking Masons. John Dewey Phillips of Anaconda, Montana and Walter Leigh Walker of San Luis Obispo, California were both the sons of prominent men. Phillip's father, James Phillips, Jr., former president of Nevada Consolidated Copper Company and one of the principals of the Anaconda Copper Mine had helped to found Consolidated Coppermines Company in 1912. One of the largest mineral collectives ever formed. This is their story.

"The first thing Howard wants you to do is to find out everything about John West and his wife. Don't do anything with the information. Just bring it back to me."

R.W. "Bob" Walker looked at Noah Dietrich. "Yes sir." He said without a smile, even though friends would have been surprised to see him without one. He was six foot one, young, and excited to be working for THE Howard Hughes.

When he had opened his private detective firm two years earlier, he hadn't even dreamed that Howard Hughes would become one of his clients. In fact, he hadn't really expected any clients.

"Mr. Dietrich," he ventured with his customary smile showing now, "Is there anything specific I should be looking for?"

"No, Bob. He wants to know everything. That's the way Mr. Hughes is. Now get to work and have a full report ready for

me in four days." Dietrich was the most powerful man RW had ever met. He was the right hand man of the most powerful man in America.

RW was the son of a displaced Texan. Born in the oil fields of Taft, California he grew up playing cards with roughnecks and watching millionaires made and destroyed. Named Risdom Walter Walker, he was called RW by friends and family. Somewhere along the way a wildcatter assumed the R stood for Robert and started calling him Bob. The name stuck. He didn't complain. He'd never liked the name Risdom anyway. On the advice of his father he enrolled in UCLA where he got a degree in geology, the whole time working in the oil fields of Southern California. He developed the reputation of a tough man with brains. A rare combination anywhere, but not as rare in the oilfields as most places.

At the age of 22 he was working as a geologist for UniCal when he hit his first gusher. It didn't make him a millionaire, but it definitely gave him enough to do what he had always dreamed of. Despite the protests of his father, that was when he abandoned the oilfields and followed his own dream. To become a detective. He had grown up hearing the stories of his Grandpa Walter's exploits in the Texas Rangers. He'd watched every serial in the picture houses having to do with crime fighters through the 20's and 30's. He'd earned his Dick Tracy badge through the comic book correspondence course by the time he was twelve. And now at the age of 22 he had the means to do it.

Walker Investigation was nothing but a small office in the heart of Long Beach. Before Noah Dietrich walked in he had barely covered his rent chasing the lost pensions of widows and spying on usually innocent spouses suspected of infidelity. He'd wavered between going back to the

oilfields or enlisting in the army to fight the Nazi's. Dietrich's appearance put him back on track. His first real case.

Real in the sense that Noah Dietrich had just dropped ten grand on his desk. It was more than he'd made in the two years since he'd hung his shingle.

"Mr. Dietrich, I'll have a full report for you by Monday." Dietrich smiled and dropped another \$500 on the desk. "I have a feeling that you will Bob. You might be just the man we are looking for." With that titillating comment he was gone. The temptation to join his pals at the bowling alley for league night called him, but stronger was the call of the money in front of him. If he came through on this for Howard Hughes, his future was golden like everything else that Hughes touched.

A trip to the Long Beach Public Library and it's newspaper index was all it took to get the basics. John West was a millionaire attorney who's star was on the rise. He'd handled cases for top Hollywood producers and executives and never lost a case. He was either the best attorney on the planet or he was crooked. RW figured it was the latter, otherwise, why would Hughes be interested? It was all routine until he started browsing the society pages to find out something about Mrs. West.

Marjorie Grace Phillips was the granddaughter of James Phillips who had put together the largest mining conglomerate in the history of the United States in Anaconda, Montana. The Consolidated Copper Company turned small fortunes to huge ones. Huge enough that her father, John Dewey Phillips had been poisoned. A tee-totaler and devout protestant, Phillips had been on the verge of selling his controlling stock in CCC and turning on

the stockholders in favor of the United Mine Workers to demand shorter days, greater safety, and better wages. It was shortly after meeting with the union in Idaho that he met with his board of directors for a luncheon and shortly died to tomatine poisoning. Curiously, he was the only victim. His distraught widow signed the paperwork brought to her by her attorneys without reading it, and unknowingly traded controlling interest for a miner's pension. The murder happened only weeks after her youngest daughter and sister had died of cat scratch fever.

Three strikes and the Phillips were out. The capitalists warmly suggested that California would be a better place for her and her two remaining children. They'd already bought the train tickets. A kind gesture.

And that was the reason that John West met Margie when he brought three pin stripe suits to Phillips Laundry and Pressing in Long Beach in 1936. At 20, Margie was a Cinderella beauty, scrubbing clothes and ironing suits. Deposed from her position as Queen of the Copper Mines, her mother had none the less, raised her children as if they were royalty. In demeanor if not in dollars.

West forgot about his suits and quickly began a whirlwind romance with the girl. Seven months later they were married. It was a Hollywood story in a paperback binding. The paperback being the society pages of the LA Times.

As RW read the stories, his eyes continually drifted to the pictures of the beautiful Mrs. West. He'd seen them before, and had the same reaction. The difference was that now, he was somehow involved with her.

"Excuse me Miss. I know this sounds like a stupid question and it probably is, but could you tell me....is it better to use

a heavy ball or a lighter one?"

The women with Margie giggled but she didn't even smile. "It's not a stupid question at all. A heavier ball is harder to control but has more impact on the pins. Haven't you ever bowled before?"

He'd never bowled at Roxy Lanes before, but he'd been bowling all his life. RW was one of the best bowlers in his league, but he couldn't let Mrs. Marjorie West know that. The big man tried to hold the ball awkwardly with his third finger in the hole instead of the middle.

"No Ma'am." He said. "But there is a big bowling tournament next month and I'm hoping to get good enough to pay for my mother's surgery. I'd really appreciate it if you could tell me what I'm doing wrong."

The socialites were giggling madly. Some of them breaking into outright laughter. Margie shushed them. "What's wrong with your mother?" she asked and then thought better of it, becoming embarrassed "I mean, never mind, I'm glad to help you if only to get away from these cackling hens." Her friends giggled even more as she moved to the big man's lane.

Two hours later when the socialites urged her to leave with them, she motioned towards her driver, still sitting in the gallery. "I've got James to get me home. I certainly can't leave now or poor Bob's mother will never get her surgery." She was amazed at the progress he was making, but more she was enjoying his raw wit and good company. She was glad to see the girls go, but still somewhat worried about what they would say to their husbands. She banished the thought. Edith Murray had been sleeping with everyone in Whittaker and it hadn't made it back to her husband. She

was sure she would be alright.

She hardly noticed the personal questions he asked because she was so intent upon improving his quickly improving game.

“John is the most honest man I know” she answered, “but Bob, you have to be careful with twisting your wrist like that. I think that is where your biggest flaw lies.” It was midnight when she left with James, feeling good that she had helped this roughneck improve to the point where he might actually win his tournament.

As she left, she turned to him while scribbling her number on a card. “Bob, would you please let me know how you do in the tournament? I'd love to know how this investment in my time turns out.” She handed it to him under the disapproving eye of James. It was exciting for her, she felt like a young single girl again.

It was worse for RW. He had gotten all the information he could want. Howard Hughes would get his report. Margie had given him more than enough to satisfy Hughes. There was one thing he would leave out however. RW was in love.

As it turned out, so was Howard Hughes. Again. John West had invited him out on his yacht for his third anniversary party. After carefully looking over the guest list, Hughes decided it wouldn't be too dangerous to attend. At least on a boat there was no chance that he would run into anyone not on the list. He was slowly becoming a recluse. Terrified of the people he didn't know and what they might think of him. Rather than disregard their opinions, he had more and more been sequestering himself from the company of anyone he didn't already know.

West's anniversary party was a huge hit. Many of the richest men in America attended and among them was Howard Hughes. Mrs. West was a huge fan of aviation and flattered Hughes with her questions. She was also, in Hughes and quite a few other men's opinions, one of the most beautiful creatures on the planet. Hughes had dated most of Hollywood's beauties and had several of them 'on retainer' as he paid huge expenses to maintain them in such a way that they were satisfied with the attention he didn't usually pay to them.

Mrs. West, however, was unavailable. That made her even more desirable.

Fact: Ganny was married to John West

Fact: RW spoke 12 languages

Fact: RW did work for Hughes

Fact: Hughes gave Ganny jewelry

Fact: RW had a friend named Bob

Fact: RW dined with Suharto, Hughes, and World Leaders

Fact: Frequent trips to Vegas, usually came home winners

Fact: RW was not in the armed forces despite perfect health

Fact: RW was killed under strange circumstances

Fact: RW was close to retirement

Fact: Ganny with exactly enough to pay her own funeral expenses

Fact: Ganny spoke of Hughes like an old friend

Fact: When Hughes fortunes turned, so did theirs

Fact: There are many questions that need to be answered here...

13 THE MYSTIC TREE

This was originally the beginning of Slackville Road when I thought to call it Slack Key Road. Silly idea. Sort of semi-autobiographical.

I was a child among the privileged but I knew the adults around me were fucked up.

My parents, for example, were miserable. They tried to escape their misery in a non stop roller coaster ride of fucking, fighting, and pretending that everything was going to be alright. Beautiful strangers would sleep over at our beautiful beach house in beautiful Hawaii. Wild parties with blue and red colored lights strung across the lanai framing the swaying hips of drunken hula and everything in the world seeming wonderful as my brother and I hoped that the inevitable call to go to bed wouldn't come. But it always did, as the adults moved closer together with Mom in the hands of a new "uncle" and Dad wandering down the beach with a lithesome "auntie". As a kid in Hawaii, every adult becomes uncle or auntie. Even for the haole kids like

us.

We'd go to bed with everything in the world seeming right and the sounds of slack key guitar kissing us goodnight. Morning was different. "Uncle" and "Auntie" would usually be gone by the time we woke up. Mom would be snappish and Dad would be gone. By the time he returned, the fighting would begin. Free love didn't seem to have anything to do with love, just a lot of hurt people with no one to blame for all the failed experiments. The parties at my parent's house had lots of drugs, lots of swingers, and lots of polyester. There didn't seem to be much else. Nothing that lasted anyway.

As a white kid in Hawaii, you either liked fighting or you hated school. I liked both. Fridays were known as 'kill haole day', and if you didn't know how to fight, you might as well not go to school. The Hawaiian and Asian kids, collectively referred to as 'locals' would spend the day pummeling every white or 'haole' kid they could find. This would go on until the kids parents pulled them from school or until the haole kid had proven that he could dish out a little punishment. Kids like me, that liked fighting, eventually ended up getting left alone by the locals.

They wouldn't fight us, so we would fight each other instead. I used to fight a kid named Sidney every day, all the way through the third grade. We were friends during the school day but we'd always argue on the bus and he would either get off at my bus stop or I would get off at his and we would scrap until someone broke us up. The thing with fighting back then was that we didn't have enough ego or pride to want to maim or kill. If we had accidentally killed, most likely we wouldn't have felt too bad about it. We didn't know that much. Or rather we hadn't learned that much yet. So Sidney and I would fight over things we'd

only started to grasp. Things like ego and women. At the end, it was all over. I mean it was all over. We would help each other up and then we would go to whoever's house was closest and play whiffle ball. If other kids showed up we invariably ganged up on them. Sometimes with the whiffle ball bats. We did the same thing if anyone besides an adult tried to stop us from fighting. But usually not with whiffle ball bats.

Sidney was my best friend. We fought but we learned how to fight from each other too. I watched Sidney make a local bully three years older than us eat dirt. Sidney was cool. I thought we would be friends for life. You never know what is going to happen with life though. Life is strange.

I did have one heroic influence in my life. Grandpa Novak, Mom's Dad. We almost never saw him because he was constantly trekking to the furthest corners of the world looking for oil. I figured he was a secret agent. I didn't know much about oil, but I knew that secret agents and spies went all over the world. I used to imagine his adventures. In my imagination he had a pet orangutan that helped him defeat bad guys. It was named Sidney. Actually, it was a lot like my friend Sidney. They both had red hair. Sidney and I had a huge fight when I told him he was named after my grandpa's orangutan.

It's a shame Grandpa wasn't around more. He really could have pointed me in the right direction. Unfortunately, the little bit of time we were able to spend together wasn't enough to influence me in a more positive way. There were too many negative things going on around me.

My parents had changed too much to spend their lives together. Dad had made the transformation from hippie beatnik to yuppie. The cocaine became more important

than music and money became more important than peace. Mom, on the other hand was still lost in flower power and refused to see that the 60's and 70's were over. She would pretend that the world was all hunky dory and then get drunk and explode.

The last fight they had was at a Mexican restaurant in Honolulu. The memory of it is as clear as a bad movie.

Dad was wearing a gold and brown aloha shirt. His blond beard had gotten so short that you could almost see the skin of his chin. His blond hair was cropped and combed neatly. Mom was wearing a leather skirt and knee high moccasins with a peasant blouse. Her black hair was in braids. My brother Jason and I were in shorts and t-shirts, like every other kid in Hawaii.

"Boys, Rachel....lift up your drinks." Jason and I smiled at each other as we lifted our cokes up to Mom and Dad's margaritas. Dad was always making goofy toasts when we went out to eat. Mom frowned and lifted her big margarita glass like it weighed a ton.

"Sometimes life can be a bitch boys," Dad said and clinked glasses with all of us. He never took his eyes off of Mom. Even to me, the youngest one there, his toast felt incomplete. It was, Dad just needed a sip of his drink to go on.

The silence as we waited for him to continue was matched by the look in Mom's eyes as she held her glass out over the table, waiting for the rest of what Dad would say.

"I'm divorcing your mother boys. I'm leaving your lives." Mom's glass shattered on the table in slow motion. Dad, had figured this was the right way to do it. Even Mom didn't

know. He figured he would break the news to us all at once, in a public place. That way Mom wouldn't be able to freak out. What an asshole.

When the waitress came to clean up the mess, Mom ordered two shots of tequila.

"Rachel, the lease is up on the house in a few weeks. I think it would be best if you and the boys went back to the mainland." Dad was suggesting it as if he still had anything to do with our lives. He sounded so calm.

"Is there another woman?" Mom asked as the waitress brought two shots and put one in front of Mom and the other in front of Dad. Mom drank one with no lime and no salt.

"Of course there is Rachel. I'm in love." I can't believe how calm he sounded. Mom then downed the shot that the waitress had put in front of Dad and stood up without saying a word. Dad started to look worried. The calm left his face.

"Rachel?" she didn't answer.

She walked from our table and out the door. We could see her on the sidewalk through the plate glass windows that lined the front of the cantina. She paced back and forth a few times.

"Stay here boys, give her a minute. Everything is going to be...", I think he knew everything was about to go crazy, "alright." That's when Mom started kicking her feet through the plate glass windows. All six of them. People were screaming as glass fell on their tables and scrambling to get out of the way.

Before anyone could stop her, she was back inside grabbing Jason and me. We left the restaurant with Dad just sitting there with a shocked look on his face. It was the last time I saw him. It was the first time I realized you could leave a crime scene and not get caught.

In 1980, my parents divorced. Mom, Jason, and I moved to Washington state, where Mom was from.. Dad stayed in Hawaii putting his past behind him, including our little family. That's why Mom changed our last name to Novak, her maiden name. She didn't want to have any reminders of Dad around. I didn't mind, I liked the sound of my new name. Jack Novak. It rhymed and it sounded tough.

It was summer when we got there and despite the protests of Grandma Novak, Mom moved us into a VW bus. We would park all over the Northwest but mostly we stayed in Seattle.

Summer in Seattle is beautiful. I don't remember it raining even once. My best friend Sidney was gone, but Jason and I had each other. We began making forts in Discovery Park and would sneak off into the forest for hours to play and imagine our future.

Mom had lots of man friends. Uncle Bill, Uncle Joe, Uncle Mike, Uncle Red. They were usually pretty cool. They would take us camping, play guitars, fix our bikes, and usually at some point suggest that we go get lost for a while. Sometimes they would give us money and say, go do something for a few hours. As a result we both became pretty independent.

Jason was great at inventing new games. We'd pretend to be trappers, pirates, mountain men, or indians. Imaginary bears and tigers chased Jason and me all over the hills in

Discovery Park. We would pretend we were hunting them and in typical mountain man fashion we started to kill as many pretend bears as we could.

The hardest part about moving to the mainland was coming to terms with the absence of “locals” and the huge number of white people. When Grandpa Novak was home from the jungles, I asked about it.

“Grandpa, how come there are so many white people here? People have different names and I haven’t got in a fight with anyone but Jason since we got here. How come no one wants to pick a fight with me?”

Grandpa was a man of few words. “Because you’re not a minority anymore Jack. White people have privileges here.”

Maybe thinking that wasn’t enough of an explanation he gave me a book, Tarzan of the Apes by Edgar Rice Burroughs, for Christmas. I found myself identifying with the Ape Man who came from the jungle and so becoming the only true white man to enter the society of whites. If he could make the transition, so could I.

Grandpa also introduced me to Sherlock Holmes, the master of observation. The combination of Holmes and Tarzan set me upon a literary journey of self discovery through books.

Books were good for me. They gave me a sense of direction that I had lacked. They provided those role models I had been missing. They were my friends when no other friends could be found.

Once started on the literary speedway, I turned on the

nitrous oxide and went into overdrive. I made leaps from dog stories like Big Red to biographies of Jefferson and Franklin. From biography I was led to history. History led to geography, sociology, and cosmology which in turn led me to sci-fi. I tumbled out of science fiction and into the lost generation through Phillip K. Dick and L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard led to Heinlein and Heinlein to Hemingway. Hemingway and Steinbeck were men I understood. They spoke the language of accomplishment. They examined their existence and came to know themselves. The outdoors and the unknown became a quest for meaning. I became obsessed with putting myself to the test while facing great adversity and becoming a man. The lost worlds of Louis L'amour and Papa Hemingway.

Our nuclear family had exploded. In the midst of the fallout, Jason began testing my ability to cope with philosophy. "In the beginning man created God" or "last night I dreamt I was an elephant. Now I don't know if I'm a man who dreamed he was an elephant or an elephant dreaming I'm a man."

I couldn't help wondering if I were anything besides an elephant dream.

The Mystic Tree

I always expect to open my eyes to the mystic tree and I always see starlight before I go to sleep.

Jack, it's time to see the starlight now Honey."It was Mom's cue to me that I should crawl into the VW's bed with Jason and get ready for sleep. It was clever of her. She made a great game out of going to bed.

“Okay boys. Close your eyes. And now reach up and push down on your eyeballs.” I was so excited that I must have moved my hands too fast. “Not so fast Jack. You’ll poke your own eyeballs out if you aren’t careful. Now, don’t press down hard. Just a little bit of pressure. Just until you start seeing the lights.”

It usually took a few seconds and then colors began bursting bursting like fireworks over my eyeballs. It was like my own private fireworks show with reds and greens and blues and yellow spiderwebs appearing and disappearing just for me. I would try to make out specific pictures. If I were able to concentrate on just one spot, the picture would clarify itself and remain stable until I either moved my eyeballs under my fingers or lost my concentration. My favorite scene never came completely clear, but would materialize fleetingly and disappear back into the swirls and flashes of color.

I could hear Mom pulling out her old tape recorder and plugging the mike into it. “Okay boys, I’m going to start recording the tape for Grandpa Novak now. 1... 2....3....action.”

“Jack, why don’t you tell Grandpa what you see right now?”

I tried to describe it. “Well, Hi Grandpa. First of all I see lots of stars flashing in the dark dark sky and they are all kinds of different colors.”

Mom narrated a bit. “Daddy, the boys and I are playing Starlight before bedtime. I thought you might like that.” Mom was always pulling out that tape recorder so that she could share our lives with Grandpa. It was fun, like we were radio stars.

From the stars flashing in a dark sky, I would begin to see the outline of a tree between the stars and me. I knew it was probably winter because the air would always have that crispness that only comes with the cold and the tree had no leaves. It seems like I was on a cliff and looking upward along its face and then through the tree and into the stars. There seemed to be something terribly important about the tree but as hard as I would concentrate, the image always faded before I had any revelations about why I was there.

Mom was beautiful back then. She had long black hair that she wore in braids or pigtails and high cheekbones under her big emotional brown eyes. We used to laugh and laugh at how crazy the world was and she would use that old tape recorder and microphone to make tapes for Grandpa. She would go anywhere that caught me or Jason's interest. Providing there wasn't any man around to shoo us away. We'd crawl through pipes, lie on the grass next to the airport and watch the planes take off, and play in streams or ditches alongside the road. Jason was five years older than me but we became best buddies for a while after the divorce. Jason looked like Mom and I looked like Dad. He had Mom's dark good looks and I had Dad's bright blue eyes and pot belly.

If I were actually a dream of the philosophical elephants, they were kind to me. I grew up to be a nice looking guy that made people laugh a lot. I didn't grow up to be fat, ugly, or disfigured. I just had a hard time with authority. The thing is, it's hard to get one of those jobs that pays a ton of money if you can't bear to be told what to do. It also makes it hard to finish college, have a relationship, or have nice things.

14 SEXY HEATHER

*Sometimes the line between fiction and reality is too close.
I cut Heather out of Slackville Road for that reason.*

For some reason, I called Heather and she invited me to come over around 7:30. Heather was one of the sexiest girls around and had always had a thing for my buddies but never for me. She was a bombshell blonde about five foot eight. Great curves, sweet face, tribal tattoos on her biceps, and always seemed to be wearing some kind of cat stripes.

She looked at me and smiled. I felt my guts press into the hard little ball they needed to be to put on my confident act. God what a sexy broad. Sometimes, I hated her fucking guts because she was such an arrogant bitch but maybe it was because I figured that she would never condescend to sleep with me. She's bossy, opinionated, gossipy, and has a body I would consider killing for. She's one of my favorite people.

The thing with Heather is that she's smart but she's coy. She uses her looks like I use the bolt cutters on chain link

fences. She'd never wanted me and probably never liked me but she wanted me to want her. She knew I wanted her. She always has a string of intelligent men chasing after her like dogs chasing their own tails. They'll never catch it. I still fantasize about her when I masturbate and I'm sure she knows. Fucking sexy evil likeable bitch. She knows it, I know that she knows.

She held the paper out so I couldn't help seeing her big tits brushing the page. Rubbed herself against me just enough so that it seemed like an accident. She looked at me, her blue eyes communicating nothing but sex and smiled with those lips I dream of on my cock. I didn't have any words.

"Imagine if you were poor Jack. Just imagine. Oops! I mean imagine if YOU were rich! Tee hee. You'd probably get laid more."She laughed. It was more of a sneer really.

Heather is completely inappropriate, all the time..

"Heather, you're a fucking bitch."I couldn't believe it as I said it. Neither could she.

"Let's go to the beach," I said.

I brought a couple of bottles of wine to the beach with me and Heather had mushroom brownies. She was being really nice. I didn't feel like I had it in me to be nasty to her. I was too drained.I wasn't sure if I felt the hallucinogenic effects setting in, but I didn't want to chance it.

We sat there on the beach talking about life. The next thing I knew we were kissing. I was kissing Heather? Life can get really weird sometimes. This girl I was sure hated me was walking back to the bus with me and we couldn't keep our hands off of each other. We fucked and fucked and

fucked. It was something we had to do. At the end of the day, I don't think we liked each other any more than we had before. It was just a necessary act. She didn't want me. She just wanted to know she was wanted.

I wondered if Heather and I would start dating. I mean, I doubted it, but it was possible. I needed to be earning some money so that I could have a future.

I put on my black suit and met Heather at the martini bar. She looked great. As usual. We started drinking and kept drinking. I felt a strange distance between us and that increased when we got to the Black Cat and my favorite bartender kept pouring me triple whiskies for singles. I got very drunk and I wasn't nice at all. I picked on all the spots I knew she was most sensitive. I joked about her clothes. I joked that she was running away from all her problems by being with me. I wasn't joking. I was trying to hurt her and make myself feel better.

I vaguely remember staggering out of the bar and telling everyone that they didn't need to worry about me. I remember Heather stopping me on the stairs and asking me to be careful. I remember the look of worry on her face. I wasn't worried though. I just staggered across the street and passed out in my car.

Post bender depression hit me hard the next morning. I tried sleeping for a while but didn't feel any better.

She called.

"You okay, Asshole?" she asked.

“Yeah. Do you hate me?” I asked, afraid of the answer.

“Haven’t I always? Let’s not get too confused about the nature of our relationship. I’m glad you made it home okay. See ya later.”

“Heather?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks.”

“Yeah, well you can be sure it’s the last time I buy your drinks. ”

The whole situation made me feel like I’d been raped by a demented version of myself. It was like a bad dream but worse because I was awake. My entire view of Heather was changing rapidly. I would never of suspected her of being so cool. Could it have been an accident?

Hey Awesome Reader!

Right now is the perfect time to go to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) (or your own website) and Write a Review of this book. Or to share it on Social Media!

If you write one and send me the link, I’ll send you an e-copy of [*Slackville Road: Two Dudes, A Dummy, and an Armored Car*](#) as a way of saying thanks.

**Send me the link to your review at
vago@vagodamitio.com**

Mahalo!

~Vago

ABOUT VAGO DAMITIO

Please feel free to find me at VagoDamitio.com. You can email me at vago@vagodamitio.com – I look forward to hearing from you! ~Vago

The Early Years

Vago Damitio was born on a crunchy snow white morning in Tacoma, Washington to a waitress and a musician on December 27, 1971.

He is the fifth generation of Damitio's born in the Puget Sound Region and descended from the Walkers, Boones, and Mcleods on his mother's side. There is some talk of royals and Cherokees in his family but one thing is certain, he was born of a family of pioneers. His ancestors were some of the first Americans in the Pacific Northwest, the first Europeans in the Americas, and the first oil men in the Gulf States. Both of his grandfathers worked in the Middle East during the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Their far ranging tales and his grandmother's collection of National Geographic Magazines led him to a thirst for travel and adventures.

His given name was Christopher and he was variously known as Chris, Christ (rhymes with Twist), and finally Vago. His childhood was spent exploring old ghost towns of the West, hiking in the mountains, and camping in the great National Parks of America. Significant time was spent digging underground forts and building treehouses in the mountains and forests of California and Oregon. An early love of books led to all of these forts being well stocked with books about travel and adventures.

From about the age of ten, Vago set about discovering how to survive in the wilds and create everything he needed. From solar stills to trapping, tanning skins to building bows and arrows from raw materials, to knapping stone tools surviving in the wilds with minimal tools or equipment. He would set out on solo camping trips in which he tested himself in the wilds from about the age of twelve onward. He became an expert with firearms and upon graduating high school opted to join the US Marines because it seemed like the most challenging thing he could put before himself.

Sergeant of Marines

His decision to join the Marines was also based on a sense of patriotism since the US was about to engage in the first significant war since Vietnam. Stories of the mighty Iraqi army and how difficult it would be to defeat the terrible Republican Guard laid his duty before him clearly. The war was over before he'd completed the three months of boot camp in San Diego. Over the next four years, he served honorably, became an expert with rifle, pistol, and knife, and achieved the rank of Sergeant before completing his obligation and earning an Honorable Discharge. He was never required to kill anyone in the service of his country, which was a huge blessing.

Radical and Dropout

In 1995 he returned to the Pacific Northwest where he worked in radio, film, and print journalism while achieving a minor degree in journalism. His explorations of Alaska, the

UK, the USA, and Canada brought him into contact with new ideas and new people and in 1996 he decided that firearms were too dangerous to be in the hands of individuals and responsibly sold all of his guns. In hindsight, he wishes he would have simply melted them down so there would be that many fewer guns in the world. From 1998 to 2000 he published and edited Conchsense, a magazine dedicated to finding the meeting point between creativity and community.

By the end of 1999, Conchsense had become too radical for its advertising base after a year spent organizing for the World Trade Organization Protests in November of 1999. The protests were a success in that they shut down the WTO meeting in Seattle, but a failure in that they didn't change the general idea and caused the global governing body to rethink how it would deal with protest and dissent. In 2000, Vago laid Conchsense to rest and joined a Silicon Valley dotcom startup called TechPlanet as a partner in Seattle.

Techplanet was typical of greedy venture capital startups and operated more on hype than substance. Seeing the writing on the wall, Damitio retired from corporate life with no money or stock options. His final act at TechPlanet was to send out an email to all the employees that they should leave before the company told them it wouldn't be able to pay them. Two months later, the company sent a notice asking employees to work without pay while they secured financing. Two weeks after that, the headquarters in Silicon Valley closed without notifying the other 52 offices around the US and that was the end of that. No one got any stock options.

Vago's next gig (late 2000) was working as a community organizer for ACORN (the Association of Communities

Organizing for Reform Now) where he helped organize tenants to fight for better conditions from slumlords and worked on bringing about awareness of predatory lending. When he suggested to his union members that they go throw bricks through the Countrywide Mortgage windows, his superiors decided it was time for him to move on. Too radical for ACORN.

At this point, Vago decided to lead by example. He would move out of his house, live in his VW van (which he'd bought for \$100), and demonstrate how those who would soon be evicted from their homes could not only survive, but thrive. Over the next twenty weeks he lived the life of a road warrior while discovering how to live in America with no home, no job, no money, and plenty of ingenuity.

The universe told him to quit in 2001 when he won more than \$2000 on a slot machine at an Indian casino. With that money he bought a ticket to China, secured a visa and left everything he'd known behind for the next four months while he climbed sacred peaks in China, met with the hill tribes in Laos, explored deserted islands in Thailand, and finally took a job teaching English in the tiny town of Parapat in Sumatra, Indonesia.

He left Parapat when the parents of his students told him that it was no longer safe to stay. Muslim vs. Christian violence was becoming terrible in Aceh, Medan, and other regions. While he would have loved to stay, it seemed wise to leave when the locals said it was no longer safe.

Returning to the USA was a shock after living among people who were quite happy with very little. The USA by contrast seemed to be a country where people were unhappy no matter how much they super-sized their lives. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001 – Vago was

a vocal opponent of revenge killing and making war to feel better but watched as flag waving American zealots ripped up his signs which read “Drop bread, not bombs. Enough have died already.”

Seeing that flag waving had replaced intelligent thought, Vago wanted to get away from the USA again. By selling everything he owned he was able to buy a one way ticket to Hawaii. He arrived with \$100 was relieved to see that in Hawaii at least, people weren't screaming for blood. From then until 2008, Vago lived in Hawaii and traveled in the Pacific exploring the Hawaiian Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, and the Philippines. In 2003 he published his first book *Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond*. It was from this book that he earned the name Vago. A friendly bartender named Random at the bar where he would think, drink, and peddle his books (Le Chat Noir in Fairhaven, Washington) began to call him 'the Vagabond', then 'Vagobond', then 'Vago'. (RIP Random!)

During his time in Hawaii he worked in Tourism. He worked as a kayak guide on the island of Kauai, a rain forest hiking guide on the island of Oahu, and developed luxury tours on the islands of Oahu, Kauai, and Maui for a high end limousine company. By the end of 2008, he had also earned a degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. During his time at UHM, Vago was the President of the Honor Student Society, Managing Editor of the student newspaper *Ka Leo*, and president of the UH chapter of the Sierra Club.

He graduated with highest honors (just like the crazy he met on the road between Bellingham and Seattle!) in the top .1% of his class. Along the way, he worked towards a minor in film making at UH's Academy of Creative Media. His anthropological focus was on the anthropology of

tourism, and the anthropology of the internet with his thesis looking at the formation of real world friendships through online interaction. It specifically used the fan boards for the TV show LOST which was filmed entirely in Hawaii. His ground breaking work was presented at the annual gathering of the American Anthropological Association.

Leaving Hawaii and Finding the World

At the end of 2008 he left Hawaii to see if he could find his place in the world. At this time, he changed the focus of his blog from writing and cultural oddities to travel. Vagobond.com was born. He met his future wife in Morocco in February of 2009. In April of 2010 they were married. In August of 2011 they welcomed their daughter Sophia into the world. During the four years since he's left Hawaii, he's been to more than 40 countries but still not found anywhere quite as wonderful as the land of Aloha.

Currently, Vago and his family live in Sefrou, Morocco where they are waiting to hear back from the US Visa and Immigration Service so that they can all return to the USA and perhaps eventually to Hawaii.

Vago is the author numerous articles, pamphlets, and stories.

Books by Vago Damitio ([All Links Here](#))

Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond (2003)

Slackville Road (2004)

The Princess and the Vagabond (2005)

The Hu Factor (2006)

Lost in Transmediality: Exploring LOST and It's Fans (2008)

Liminal Travel (2009)

Spiritual Fasting: Faith, Love, and Jihad (2010)

Finding your Passion Income: Becoming Free (2010)

Douchebags, Fags, and Hags (2011)

Meliptimous Taggle and Other Stories (2012)

Not My Morocco (2012)

Smooth Living: Beyond the Life of a Vagabond (2013)

The Keys to the Riad (2013)